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14 April –
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PRIVATE EYE

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Gnome

IN THE mounting hysteria surrounding the death of an unfortunate swan in Scotland, is it not perhaps time to inject a note of commonsense into the proceedings?

After all, the demise of one solitary bird, though regrettable, hardly constitutes a pandemic. Yet, to judge by some of the newspaper headlines, we were in the midst of some great national emergency. We at the Daily Gnome can assure our readers that our reporting of the subject will be rational and scientific and we will not give way to any of the scaremongering or sensationalism that has so marred the media coverage hitherto.

Lord Gnome,
The Isolation Unit,
The Gnome Underground Hospital,
The Gobi Desert.

On Other Pages

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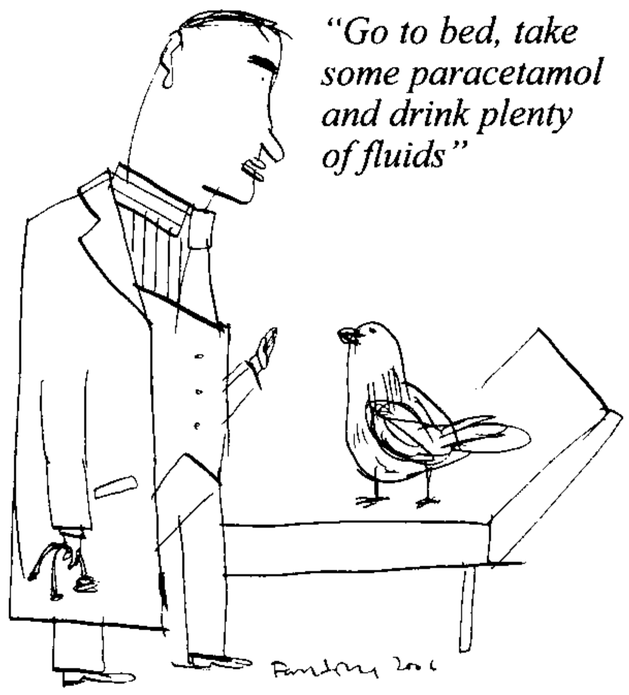

"Go to bed, take some paracetamol and drink plenty of fluids"

EDITORIAL
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ABC

Flu what a scorcher!

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THE chancellor's number two, Treasury Chief Secretary Des Browne, has finally admitted what his boss has long denied: that the government's addiction to the expensive and discredited private finance initiative can be explained by the way it massages the public accounts.

As pointed out in the last *Eye*, Gordon Brown's budget announcement that £26bn worth of investment would be channelled through PFI enabled him to claim that he will stay within his rule that public debt doesn't exceed 40 percent of gross domestic product (the so-called "sustainable investment" rule), once again raising the suspicion that PFI was being used to flatter the figures.

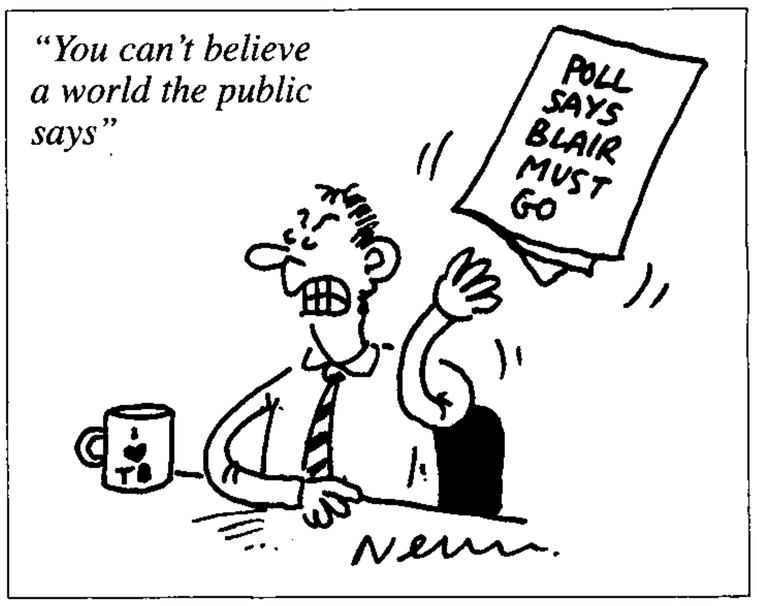
The following day during Treasury questions in the Commons, this point was raised by Tory MP Brian Binley. After some standard PFI waffle from Browne, the ever-eager Ed Balls, formerly the Treasury's chief economist and the brains behind most of Gordon's policies, attempted a helpful intervention. What, wondered Balls, would be the consequences for investment if PFI commitments were brought on to the government's books?

Browne seized the opportunity to confirm that "such movement on to the balance sheet would put the country in a position in which it could not meet the sustainable investment rule and thus could not invest further in public services and our infrastructure".

So there you have it. The requirement to meet the arbitrary 40 percent rule determines how public investment is made. The answer is always PFI as, even though it generates greater liabilities for the future, they don't show up on today's books. Years of official protestations about PFI's use only where it provides value for money compared with conventional borrowing and investment have been a diversion, while the requirement to prove this in each case by fiddling the figures (see *Eyes passim*) is exposed as an expensive charade played out by armies of managers and consultants.

The government's investment programme was always going to be delivered under PFI, regardless of the disastrous consequences now emerging in the health service and elsewhere, because it makes the books – and more importantly the man in charge of them – look better.

BROWN MISSION SHOCK



MORE evidence emerges of the deep and genuine friendship between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Ian Kirby, political editor of the *News of the World*, was "called in" to interview the prime minister and chancellor together in a show of comradeship. Kirby duly turned up and was heading for the appointed room when he heard the Number 10 press chief Dave Hill say: "Okay, he's coming! Start talking now!"

The door swung open and, hey presto, Kirby found Labour's top duo in apparently warm conversation with each other, the very picture of domestic contentment.

YET another identikit press release from New Labour HQ backfired on two of the MPs who sent it to their local paper.

Reporters at the *Barnet Times* were fascinated to receive a press release about Andrew Dismore's one-on-one briefing with Gordon Brown, accompanied by a photograph of the pair sitting at a table with a mug each, a copy of the budget and an A4 notepad, presumably for working over the figures.

But what is this? In the same hour another press release arrived from neighbouring MP Rudi Vis about *his* one-on-one briefing with Gordon Brown, with photo.

Sharp-eyed hacks noticed that "both men appear to have written down the same words… in the same handwriting and are drinking from the same mug". How long was that queue to "have your photo taken with the chancellor"?

IT was only ever going to be a matter of time before the Financial Services Authority (FSA) decided that controversial hedge funds could be sold to the public.

One man who's very keen on the idea is FSA managing director Hector Sants, who simultaneously announced that hedge funds would be able to list on the London stock market. The big winners, coincidentally, will be banks like Sants' former employer, CSFB, for whom the ducking and diving of hedge funds provides many times the brokerage fees that traditional investment funds ever will.

DEATHS

BLAIR-BROWN The Reverend D. Blair-Brown (retired) died peacefully Thursday 30th March in Salisbury.

The Times

NEWS

DESPITE the government's failure to pay English farmers almost £3bn of their EU subsidies, it's business as usual for those behind the financial fiasco.

Though Johnston McNeill has lost his job as head of the government's Rural Payments Agency, he is still drawing his £150,000 salary while suspended and his future "is discussed".

And while short-changed farmers face extra interest payments of £25m to cover their borrowings, Farms Minister Lord Bach, who was accused by MPs on the rural affairs committee of showing "an unacceptable degree of complacency", is carrying on regardless.

Meanwhile Accenture, the contractor behind the disastrous computer system, has seen its fees double from £18m to £37m. When it announced that it was going to run the system, partner Marcus Robinson promised that Accenture would "draw on its deep knowledge of government services and industry experience to help modernise the way that the Rural Payments Agency carries out its business and enable it to make payments to its customers more efficiently". Instead it has drawn on its deep experience of delivering government systems late and over budget. Not that this has tarnished it, or Marcus Robinson, in the government's eyes. Health Minister Lord Warner has just appointed Robinson to the Pathology Service Review Panel, set up to recommend privatisation of the NHS's pathology labs.

THE Treasury will soon have to lift its head from the sand and face up to the multi-billion pound costs of companies challenging British tax law in the European courts.

Three months ago *Private Eye* 1148 revealed the staggering bill that could emerge from just one of the group litigation orders (GLOs), under which companies led by British American Tobacco are claiming compensation for the government having illegally operated so-called "franked investment income" (FII) laws. The government told the European court a defeat would cost the British taxpayer €7bn – roughly £5bn. And last week the court's advocate-general gave his opinion, almost certain to be followed in the judges' final ruling, that European law had indeed been breached – a finding that came as no surprise to tax experts as the UK rules blatantly (even if quite reasonably) discriminate between British and foreign companies.

If the Treasury minister responsible, Paymaster-General Dawn Primarolo, is to be taken at her word, however, she had a bit of a shock. Soon after the *Eye* exposed the possible damage, Tory MP Daniel Kawczynski asked if the Treasury would take it into account in the budget figures. Primarolo dismissed the idea with the response that "the government are confident that the current FII legislation is fully conformant with both its domestic and international legal obligations". This was almost certainly a straightforward lie to avoid criticism when the chancellor duly omitted the figures in his rosy budget projections last month.

THE BEST way of guarding one's privacy is – surprise, surprise – to work for the government.

In the week that ID cards were finally approved, requiring private individuals to supply the state with their names, photographs, fingerprints and a host of other sensitive personal data, the Home Office refused a Freedom of Information request from Phil Booth of the NO2ID campaign, asking for the names of staff working on the project.

Booth did discover that the taxpayer has already funded 186 staff to work on the ID card programme to date, of whom 54 are civil servants, 98 consultants and 34 "interim" staff. None of the positions was advertised.

Street Of Shame

SURREAL scenes at the high court last week as the *News of the Screws* tried to prevent George Galloway – or anyone else – publishing photos of hack Mazher Mahmood, aka the fake sheikh.

On behalf of the *Screws*, Richard Spearman QC cited the case brought by Naomi Campbell against the *Mirror* in support of his claim that people were entitled to a "reasonable expectation" that their photos wouldn't be reproduced in newspapers.

Understandably puzzled, the judge pointed out to Spearman that "the partners of footballers are frequently photographed on shopping expeditions – you can't say that their privacy is being infringed."

Heroically keeping a straight face, the *Screws*' QC replied: "The answer is that it almost certainly is being infringed."

The judge expressed astonishment that the *Screws* of all papers should take such a line. He'd have been even more surprised had he looked at page 15 of the previous Sunday's issue – which had a photo of Naomi Campbell, clearly taken without her consent, shying away from the camera. Elsewhere in the same edition were five snatched photos of Boris Johnson leaving his lover's flat, three of former Atomic Kitten star Natasha Hamilton wearing a bikini on holiday and two of Kylie Minogue walking with her boyfriend in a Paris street. No doubt these people also had a "reasonable expectation" that the *Screws* wouldn't run photos obtained without their knowledge or approval – until it did.

THE *Guardian* declared that its 60-page Easter puzzle special contained games "from sudoku to classic family favourites".

Family favourites? Hm. The supplement included a quiz question about rap star 50 Cent launching his own range of vibrators. Another question quoted Noel Gallagher as saying: "I fucking hate them two." While another repeated Robbie Williams comments on his recent video: "I have sex with two girls and then it looks like I'm having sex with men."

Fun for all the family indeed…

AFTER the Bahrain cruise boat disaster, the *Sun* ran long and touching tributes to the British victims, writing at length about a 33-year-old British engineer working in the Gulf state called Scott Belch.

Unfortunately the paper mistakenly described him as engaged to a woman called Sandy. In fact the couple were married and Sandy was pregnant with their baby when they both drowned aboard the Arab dhow.

But that wasn't the worst of the *Sun*'s blunders.

"[Scott's] Parents Geoffrey and Sandra from Redhill, Surrey, were devastated last night," the paper revealed. "Mr Belch, cradling his sobbing wife, said: 'We have only just been told by the Foreign Office that our son has been killed'."

What the paper neglected to mention was that the Foreign Office wasn't the first to tell the couple the tragic news. That honour went to a *Sun* reporter who phoned their house that morning to tell them that their son's name was on the list of those drowned in the disaster.

A *Sun* hack later turned up at the house and was sent away by the distraught parents. He promptly hot-footed it across the road to let the neighbours know the news and get their reactions. Before long, a scrum of press and TV journalists had formed and a police cordon was erected to keep them away from the Belch house. A touching tribute indeed…

ASTROLOGER Jonathan Cainer is renowned as one of the best paid writers on the *Daily Mail*. With a lucrative staff contract and, more importantly, the income from his astrology phone-lines, Cainer has often been reported to earn in excess of £2m.

But has anyone noticed just how personal Cainer manages to make his predictions for this vast sum? At the end of each star sign's forecast he urges readers to call his phone line. On one day last week, for example, he wrote to Aries readers: "What does April have in store? There's excellent news in your new long-range, in-depth forecast. To hear it call…" Cainer then provided the telephone number for his premium rate line. Next up was Taurus readers who were told at the end of their forecast: "What does April have in store? There's excellent news in your… etc" And so it went on through all 12 star signs.

On another day last week, all the different star signs were told: "There is a powerful, inspiring and important prediction in your latest in-depth forecast. To hear it, call…"

Surely all *Mail* readers weren't going to receive "excellent news" or an "important prediction" at the same time? To find out call Lord Gnome on…

THE *Daily Mail*'s leader column warns its middle England readers not to over-react to the bird flu outbreak.

"The headlines could hardly be more lurid. Schools to be closed to prevent tens of thousands of children dying… official estimates of the possible death toll ranging from 50,000 to 750,000. All this on the basis of, so far, one dead swan," opined the paper.

Could this be the same *Daily Mail* that in recent weeks has brought us level-headed headlines such as "Schools could shut in bird flu alert to save 50,000 lives" or "Cats may help bird flu spread among people" or, the *Eye*'s favourite, "Plague pit plans for bird flu dead"?

HILARITY and amazement at the *Daily Mail* last week when a libel writ arrived from peripatetic Italian lawyer Giovanni di Stefano.

He is suing over an editorial in the paper's Irish edition which deplored his campaign on behalf of Dublin gangster Patrick "Dutchy" Holland (see last *Eye*). The particular phrase that prompted his writ was the *Mail*'s depiction of di Stefano as an "odious self-publicist and champion of lost causes".

Since he has at various times boasted of being the legal adviser to Slobodan Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, Kenneth Noye and Ronnie Biggs, it's not clear why he finds this description so offensive. Perhaps he would prefer the words used by an Old Bailey judge in 1986, when sentencing di Stefano to five years for his part in a £25m fraud – "a swindler without scruple or conscience".

"You have to face it, Lucy – he's put you on a pedestal"

ECCENTRIC Irish singer Sinead O'Connor already has a penchant for male hacks – she's on record as having had relationships with four different journalists, one of whom she married – and has now revealed publicly that she has slept with Aengus Fanning, editor of the *Irish Independent*.

She also claims she has a photograph of him wearing a black satin thong and has threatened to publish this if he lets his paper write about her latest affair with the estranged husband of another Irish singer, Mary Coughlan.

In response the *Independent* published an acknowledgement of the affair with Fanning and insisted it had no bearing on any story it might write about Sinead O'Connor.

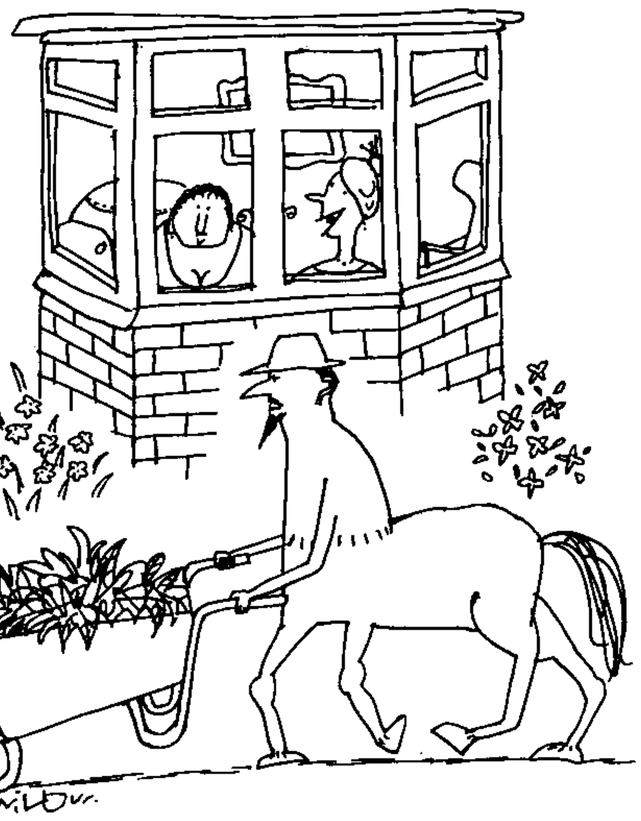
The next instalment of the saga then unfolded via text messages which O'Connor sent to Mary Coughlan. "I eat crazy bitches like you for breakfast" and "you won't be saying that when I break your f****** face" gives a flavour. All this from the singer whose latest album is called "Throw Down Your Arms".

WHEN the *Daily Mail* decided to tackle the issue of household rubbish, journalist Alice Smellie was put on the case. Commissioning editors didn't spot the connection between the hackette's byline and the subject matter, but editor Paul Dacre did and the air duly turned blue with expletives.

For some reason he was not amused at the thought of a double-page spread appearing entitled "What a Load of Rubbish. Modern packaging has left Britain drowning in a sea of waste" by Alice Smellie.

An underling pointed out that Smellie's maiden name was Robinson and the by-line was quickly changed. Smellie was bemused when her piece appeared until *Mail* bosses explained that the foul-mouthed Dacre had been behind the change.

Hacks are waiting with bated breath to see what happens when Smellie's next feature appears – an investigation into babies' nappies.



"He's a very good gardener... and, of course, there's all the manure"

"THOUSANDS of unemployed asylum seekers granted sanctuary elsewhere in the EU" can "claim free housing" in Britain, howled the *Daily Mail* after a court ruling against Barnet Council last week.

Hang on a minute. If they've been granted sanctuary, surely they aren't asylum seekers any more? And indeed they're not – neither Hassan Ismael nor Nimco Abdi is seeking asylum, since they both *already have* refugee status granted by the Netherlands. Their cases were therefore about the rights of citizens in the EU to housing assistance, and had nothing whatever to do with asylum seekers, who can't claim council housing, free or otherwise.

Obviously the *Mail* couldn't let that get in the way of a good rant. The Refugee Council has filed a complaint with the Press Complaints Commission.

SHOME MISHTAKE?

"Charles Davy, father of Prince Harry's girlfriend Chelsy, has turned his back on the controversial big-game hunting business which was giving him a bad reputation, the *Mail on Sunday* has learned."

– Mail on Sunday, *19 February 2006*.

"The full extent of the wildlife slaughter that has made millions for the family of Prince Harry's girlfriend is today exposed by the Mail on Sunday... our undercover reporter joined a safari run by the firm [Charles Davy] built up and witnessed how hunters were charged less that £400 to shoot animals."

– Mail on Sunday, *2 April 2006*.

"My God, how embarrassing – mutton dressed as mutton"

PROTEST MOVEMENT

THE Sheila McKechnie Foundation (SMF) was set up last year in memory of the former director of Shelter and the Consumers Association, who died of cancer in 2004, with the aim of encouraging and celebrating the work of campaigners who stand up to government and big business.

All very laudable; and on 27 March it held its inaugural awards ceremony at which speakers included Shami Chakrabarti, the director of Liberty, Lord Puttnam and Gordon Brown, a patron of the charity.

While the chancellor was holding forth on the importance of standing up to government, however, Allison Edwards from Shropshire, who blames her son's autism on the MMR vaccine, got on the stage and began to protest about government vaccination policy. She was soon hauled away by Matthew Sowemimo, the foundation's burly development manager and the audience was told that Edwards would be given five minutes to put her case to "Gordon" after he had finished his speech. In fact she was merely allowed to hand over her card.

All very embarrassing.

Notice to members & bonified guests.

Dairies Sports & Social Club, Carmarthen

JUST FANCY THAT!

GREEN-fingered readers buy the monthly magazine *Gardener's World* to explore gentle topics such as chasing weeds from lawns and planting herbaceous borders.

So it was with some surprise that they spotted a brain-teaser at the back of the mag which challenged them to find as many words as possible using just nine letters. The letters, in no particular order, were "D Y F A T C U N T". Are the magazine's journalists trying to pass readers a subliminal message?

MORE ON MORON

HERE'S a line you never thought you'd see in the *Eye* – Piers Morgan Tells Truth Shock. Well, up to a point, Lord Copper.

The *Eye* has seen a copy of the hitherto secret report commissioned by the board of Trinity Mirror from law firm Lovells on 2 February 2000, the day the *Daily Telegraph*'s Suzy Jagger broke the story of how Moron had bought substantial quantities of shares in technology company Viglen the day before the *Mirror*'s "City Slickers" tipsters had given the company a huge plug, causing its share price to double overnight.

Moron was quoted in the *Telegraph*'s story as having admitted buying "about £20,000 worth" of Viglen shares. This was the figure later given to the Press Complaints Commission by Paul Vickers, the *Mirror*'s legal director. Yet the true value of shares purchased by Moron and his wife that day was £67,000. This was not publicly revealed until the trial of City Slickers writer James Hipwell last year.

Eye 1148 asked: "*Who was responsible for this misleading figure – was the Mirror covering up for Moron or simply repeating what he had told them?*"

According to Lovells' report, Moron was interviewed on 3 February 2000 and told investigators that shortly after midday on 17 January 2000 he had bought £20,000 of shares in Viglen via a stockbroking firm, Kyte Securities, that he had used cash sitting in a PEP to buy another £35,000 worth, and that his wife had bought £12,000 worth via her general PEP.

So – surprise – Morgan *was* honest with Lovells. But the Trinity Mirror board, then chaired by Sir Victor Blank, knowing the true extent of his shareholding, allowed the PCC to be misled. Moron, likewise, had not disclosed the true figure to the *Telegraph*.

Eye 1148 quoted Morgan as saying "the exact number of shares I bought in Viglen was known to Trinity Mirror within a few hours of the *Telegraph* story first appearing in February 2000". This prompted the *Eye* to ask: "*Why didn't the PCC know the truth about this central fact?*" The answer, again, is because Trinity Mirror misled the PCC.

The line that has been spun by Trinity Mirror to the PCC, which has understandably demanded to know why it wasn't told the truth back in 2000, is that it was all part of a cunning plan to assist the DTI investigation into the affair – to smoke out who knew what among the various hacks who had "piled in" to Viglen, in the way that police sometimes withhold vital clues in murder investigations, so that there are some facts that only the police and the killer know. Hmm. It remains to be seen whether the PCC will buy this when it meets to reconsider the matter at the end of April.

A Trinity Mirror spokesman told the *Eye*: "The company and its external lawyers, Lovells, conducted a full review, and all of the evidence we were able to discover was made available to the DTI.

"Following a four-year investigation by DTI inspectors and special investigators, whose powers include the compulsion of third party witnesses, the DTI decided to prosecute Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell, and not to prosecute Piers Morgan.

"The Press Complaints Commission was investigating press reports of a £20,000 share transaction by Mr Morgan. We provided all the information relevant to that investigation."

CALLED TO ORDURE

EVEN Joe 90 minus his Coke bottle specs could have spotted the tension between Blairites and Brownites at their "demonstration of unity" when Labour launched its local elections campaign.

Wednesday morning's event at Devon House, near Tower Bridge, was an event of spectacular dishonesty, straight out of the early days of New Labour spin. It was a propaganda mission that was to go hilariously wrong.

Blair and Brown arrived in a shared car, prickling with tension. Press photographers, peeved at being kept waiting in the shade on a frosty April morning, scored their revenge by getting a snap of the PM apparently pushing his rival in the back.

Inside, they were filmed chatting to "ordinary" people. The idea was that viewers would think the politicians were out on the stump, taking their policies to random members of the public. Yeah, right! The "ordinary" people were in fact hard-core Labour members who had been bussed in from various parts of the country and had been told to clap hard and say nothing awkward.

Reporters at first didn't know whether to shrug at this blatant deceit or take affront. Their minds were made up for them when black-suited, young, male apparatchiks humourlessly told them they must stand at the back of the room and "no questions!" Fleet Street's finest took this as a declaration of war. When Blair and Brown went to a phone bank to "take calls", all the hacks inevitably dialled the number to try to get through to the PM or chancellor.

As the event continued, hacks started to surge from their quarantine area and scatter all round the room, eavesdropping on the wooden conversations Blair, Brown, Prescott et al were having with their tame "members of the public". (Brown's table discussed the difficulty of parking outside fish and chip shops. Blair's table talked about who liked tea and who liked coffee.) One of the Labour thugs tried to stiff-arm a woman from the *Times* and a man from the *Daily Mail* – and seemed to be on the verge of resorting to force when he realised that Radio 4's *World At One* was recording the entire encounter with a nearby live mike. His glare suddenly turned to a sickly grimace of amiability.

With Blair's grin almost creaking with the effort, his press chief Dave Hill watched the unfolding car crash with an air of queasy defeat. Hearing a tabloid hack refer to the young heavies as "goons", Hill responded, "oh, I say, that's not terribly polite". Key Blair aide Jo Gibbon saw reporters descending on Gordon Brown. She lifted her eyes to the ceiling and left the hacks to their feeding frenzy.

By now some of the TV camermen had discarded their tripods and were filming the action from the hip, war-zone style. John Prescott attacked the "damn media" and then placed his hands over his eyes, as if wishing he could be somewhere else. The bussed-in Labour party stalwarts started to tut and hiss when the hacks started to shout questions at party chairman Ian McCartney.

Damian McBride, Gordon Brown's senior aide, quietly moved his way through the reporters murmuring that Brown was "surprised and disappointed" that Blair's people had ruled out press questions. Brown and Blair left in separate cars, Brown in a prudent Vauxhall, Blair in a Jag. Brown, asked if he was "still Tony's best friend", gave a smile that could have frozen tripe.

'Gavel Basher'

SLEAZE UPDATE

THE current blizzard of sleaze stories in Whitehall and Westminster may thwart one of of Tony Blair's dearest wishes: to abolish the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, which vets the movement of ministers and mandarins into private sector.

This is the committee which triggered David Blunkett's resignation last autumn, after he omitted to tell it about his job with DNA Biosciences. It has been at loggerheads with Downing Street since 2003, when it recommended that Air Chief Marshal Sir John Day should wait a year after leaving the RAF before taking up a job with BAE Systems, one of the RAF's chief suppliers. Unprecedentedly, Blair overruled the committee, insisting that the "wider national interest" required Sir John to whiz through the revolving door without delay.

Exasperated by the committee's prim insistence on "propriety principles", Blair asked Sir Patrick Brown to review the rules governing business appointments – "to ensure that they are compatible with a public service that is keen to encourage greater interchange with the private and other sectors which is essential for effective delivery". With those terms of reference it was obvious enough what he wanted: more and faster revolving doors.

As a former permanent secretary at the Department of Transport who now runs a large private rail and bus company, Sir Patrick was happy to oblige. His report, published last December, proposed that the watchdog should be either neutered or put down, with its responsibilities transferred to the civil service commissioners. He also said a ban on ex-civil servants lobbying their former departments should be dropped.

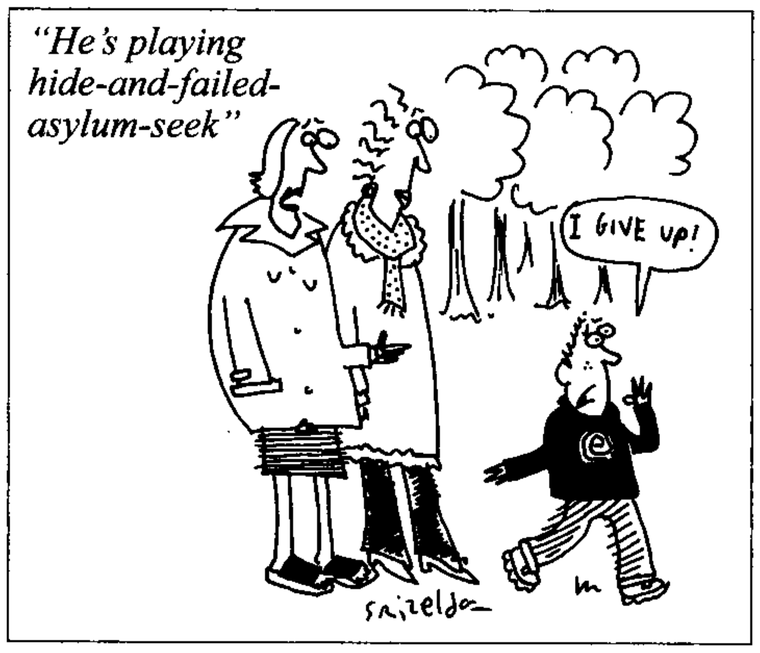
But Blair could hardly scrap the committee so soon after the Blunkett scandal without it seeming like an act of revenge. So he played for time by referring the issue to the Commons public administration select committee (PASC).

This has given the advisory committee time to mount a robust counter-offensive. "The committee does not recognise the basis for some of the assumptions in Sir Patrick Brown's report," it declared in a damning memo sent to PASC last week.

Sir Patrick's account of how the system works is "misleadingly incomplete"; some of his conclusions are "simplistic". His blithe acceptance of ex-mandarins lobbying their former colleagues earns this riposte: "The committee believes that such activities will inevitably be open to suspicion and are thus, until there has been a suitable lapse of time, incompatible with a system that exists for the purpose of providing public reassurance of propriety."

Furthermore, "Sir Patrick's proposals appear to entail the removal from the rules of the present option to delay an appointment where a Crown servant has had, for example, commercially sensitive information that could distort competition for a government contract." As the memo notes, with deadpan sarcasm: "The committee would not expect this to enhance public confidence."

When PASC issues its report later this spring, the Dear Leader will have to decide whether to kill the watchdog. With public confidence already at an all-time low, it could yet be Blair who has to retreat with his tail between his legs.



GORDON BROWN's budget contained a multi million pound tax break for property companies that was strongly backed by a businessman who donated £56,000 to the Labour party.

This year Brown finally agreed to allow the creation of Real Estate Investment Trusts, known as REITS. By putting their properties into one of these new "tax efficient" trusts, firms can avoid paying 30 percent corporation tax on rents, and also avoid tax when they sell property.

Property companies could gain millions from the move – a fact that will not be lost on businessman Kevin McGrath, a long-standing promoter of REITS who gave £56,000 to Labour last year in cash and premises. He also ran as Labour's candidate in North East Hampshire in the 2005 election, where he came third.

McGrath is a partner in the multi billion-property firm REIT Asset Management which operates in countries where these trusts have already been made legal. McGrath, however, denied that his donation was related to this backing for REITS, and insisted it came from his "personal commitment to the Labour Party".

SPANISH construction group Ferrovial's chances of taking over BAA plc, the owner of most of Britain's airports, have been boosted by the firm's teaming up with Australian bank Macquarie.

Since last year the Aussie bank that specialises in buying up transport assets on behalf of its investors has had former New Labour minister Lord (Gus) MacDonald on its payroll as a "senior adviser". MacDonald's highest profile government job was as transport minister, where he was responsible for, among other matters, the Civil Aviation Authority – the body that has to declare whether any approach for BAA would be in the public interest.

ALTHOUGH some commentators uncharitably described the departure of the head of the NHS Sir Nigel Crisp as a sacking, albeit one sweetened by a peerage and cushy number advising developing countries on healthcare, he and the government were at pains to point out that he went of his own accord.

Number 10 announced that Sir Nigel "has informed the Prime Minister of his wish to retire from the post", while Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt was sorry to see him give up. "On a personal level I regret his decision," she said.

How odd then that in a parliamentary answer just before the Easter break, Health Minister Liam Byrne admitted that Crisp was "retiring on standard *compulsory* early retirement terms". In other words, he gets the deal normally reserved for those pushed out with nowhere else to go, which means a full pension from the tender age of 54 – easily worth a six-figure bonus – along with the ermine and new job.

Who says the government isn't tough on public sector pensions?

Number crunching

£800m

- Current extra funding for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Current estimated shortfall in NHS budget.

DAVID CAMERON's comment that the UK Independence Party provided a home for "closet racists" elicited howls of rage from Nigel Farage MEP. "Disgraceful!" said the UKIP leader in the European parliament. "We simply will not accept this type of smear."

Yet Farage knows better than most that there has indeed been some two-way traffic between UKIP and the racist parties of the far right. Older readers may recall Farage's mysterious lunch in June 1997 with Mark Deavin, a prominent member of the British National Party, who had been expelled from UKIP the previous month when his role as a BNP infiltrator was discovered (*Eye* 988). The purpose of their *tête-à-tête* has still not been explained.

More recently, when Farage stood for UKIP in Thanet South at last year's general election, his agent was local party bigwig Martyn Heale – previously a candidate and branch organiser for the National Front!

THE allegedly "non-party" pressure group Doctors for Reform, which last week called for patient charges and more market-style health reforms, has angered many doctors and patients alike.

So who are Doctors for Reform?

One of the lead signatories and spokesmen for the group is cancer consultant Dr Maurice Slevin. Three years ago he wrote a controversial pamphlet, *Resuscitating the NHS*, for the right-wing think tank, the Centre for Policy Studies, which was set up by Margaret Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph in 1974.

Three years ago Slevin was happy to emphasise his involvement in private practice, unfavourably contrasting the care and regime in NHS hospitals with what he termed a "large" private hospital in central London – which turned out to have a mere 138 beds. His CPS pamphlet suggested the answer was to replace the NHS with a voucher scheme which would allow patients who could afford it to "top up" and go private.

Then Slevin had only 16 doctor supporters. Now that he is declaring his NHS credentials and commitment to its values, his name appears among 870 signatories, including a failed Lib Dem parliamentary candidate, a failed Tory candidate and a signed-up Labour supporter to give it its "cross party" appeal.

IF THE threat of further Lords reform isn't enough to make those pesky peers stop opposing anti-terror laws, there are other means of intimidation, as Labour peer Lord Rea found out when he hosted a meeting called *The Nightmare of Control Orders* at the House of Lords.

Speakers advertised for the event included leading lawyers and campaigners, as well as the "victims of control orders", a curious mix of curfews and tagging which fall short of full-blown house arrest.

The Home Office and Black Rod duly had a collective seizure. Lord Rea received a phone call from Black Rod reprimanding him for sponsoring the meeting and warning him that if anyone under such an order attended the meeting they would be arrested and Lord Rea could be considered an accessory. An email from Home Secretary Charles Clarke followed, reiterating the message.

In fact the victims who spoke at the meeting included the wife and daughter of the Palestinian man Abu Rideh who described the stress of living under constant monitoring, with 4am check calls and no visitors allowed in their home until they are vetted by the Home Office.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

IT'S declaration time again at the European parliament, and MEPs have been rushing to declare all their other outside jobs and perks. Yeah, right...

Declarations should be filed annually; but Labour's Glenys Kinnock and UKIP's Roger Knapman are two prominent British MEPs who have not filed since July 2004. Theoretically they could be suspended. But no one on the gravy train is holding their breath.

How is such a laissez-faire system possible? For a start, there is no system for monitoring declarations, only for filing them. And MEPs can also justifiably claim some lack of clarity in the rules. These state that, pending a comprehensive European code, national standards shall apply.

One rule that *does* exist in the European parliament is that MEPs should "refrain" from accepting any "gift or benefit in the performance of their duties". But rules are made to be broken. And two MEPs – Scottish Tory Struan Stevenson and Portuguese Socialist Paulo Casaca – deserve special attention in this regard.

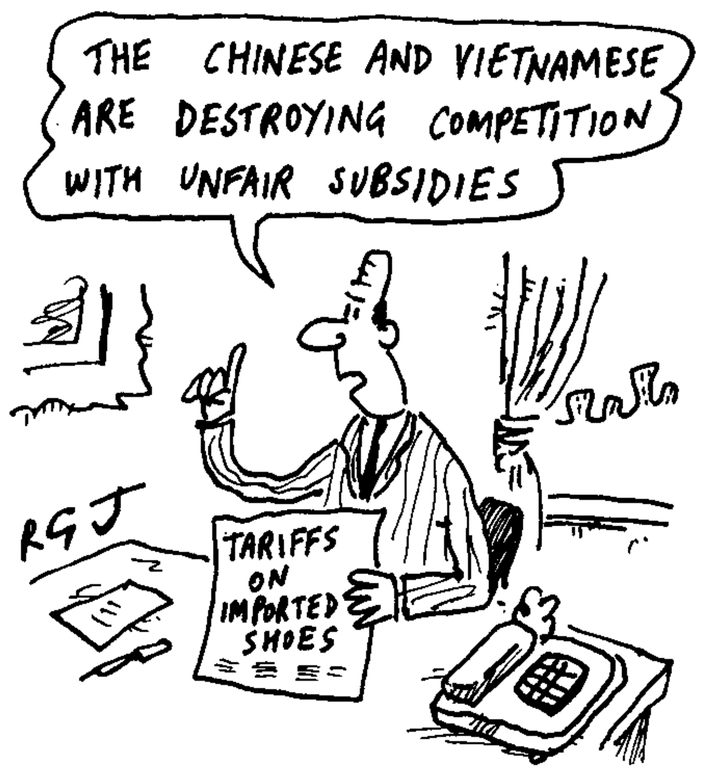
Not only did Stevenson and Casaca accept gifts, but they did so from the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an outfit listed as a terrorist front by the US State Department. Under the names People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI) and Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), the NCRI is also on EU blacklists too.

This didn't apparently stop Stevenson accepting an Iranian painting and a "small Persian rug" from the NCRI in 2004, however. Casaca, meanwhile, benefited from rather greater largesse. A letter of 6 June 2005 details NCRI gifts including Persian carpets, ceramics, engravings and a Hugo Boss wristwatch.

Both MEPs industriously promote NCRI's interests in Brussels, staging meetings and press conferences calling for the removal of the EU terror tag on the PMOI.

Without any official monitoring, the declarations system ultimately relies on public scrutiny. But as with EU affairs in general, the public shows little interest. When the *Eye* consulted the files in late March after a previous visit in January, only one other person had made a check in the meantime.

EU-phemisms



Only *we're* allowed to do that

Down on the Farm

A DOCUMENT just published by a group of leading farmers and academics reveals a chilling picture of the collapse in British agriculture during the past 10 years. Using only official figures, the paper provides chapter and verse on the dramatic decline in this country's ability to feed itself.

In 1995, in food which can be grown in these islands, we were still 87 percent self-sufficient. A sharp drop which began in the last years of the Major government is now accelerating faster than ever, so that we are now meeting only 70 percent of our needs. By 2010, if this fall continues, we shall be heading for 60 percent.

But the scale of this decline is even more shocking when one looks at the fate of specific sectors. Such a flood of cheap poultry meat is now pouring into Britain from Brazil and Thailand (those £2.99 chickens in Tesco) that imports have increased from 1,000 tons a year to 70,000; of birds often produced under health and welfare conditions which in Britain would be a criminal offence.

In 1995 Britain was still producing 109 percent of its beef consumption, with a thriving export trade. Today that figure has fallen to 71 percent, with huge quantities of beef being imported from countries such as Argentina and Brazil (where, according to NASA, more than 15,000 square miles of rainforest were destroyed in 2004 alone, mainly for cattle ranching).

In 1994 we still had 476,000 acres producing fruit and vegetables. This had fallen 10 years later by 22 percent to only 373,000 acres. The value of imported fruit and veg rose in the same period from £1.99bn to £3.17bn. The UK's pig herd has dropped in 10 years from 789,000 to 468,000, while imports of pig meat have more than doubled, from 362,000 tons to 738,000 (much of this from countries with much less stringent welfare rules than those unilaterally introduced by Britain in 1997). By banning sow stalls and tethers, in response to animal rights campaigners, we have exported half our pig production to countries where these are still in use.

No sector has seen such a collapse as dairy farming, thanks to the Alice in Wonderland economics which allow supermarkets to squeeze down the price they pay UK farmers to 17p a litre, while selling it on to their customers at 50p (with bottled water selling at nearly £1 a litre). What gives the supermarkets the whip hand is that they can import so much surplus milk and other dairy products from other EU countries, at prices kept low either by subsidies or cheap production methods (eastern Europe). The result is that UK dairy farmers are still going out of business in droves (the number of dairy farms has fallen in 10 years by nearly half, from 35,000 to below 20,000).

What the Commercial Farmers Group naturally calls for in its paper is action to reverse all those policies which in the past decade have combined to drive farmers to the wall. They do at least mention the bizarre way in which successive governments have managed to make a mockery of the Common Agricultural Policy by ensuring that the subsidies to UK farmers are the lowest in the EU. But the real problem is that the politicians, Labour and Tory, no longer have any interest in whether UK farming survives or not. So long as food can be imported more cheaply from elsewhere, who cares?

'Muckspreader'

O·B·N

"I think that he [Blair] should never stand down... Why should he not serve the full term he was elected for? I have just been to Argentina and he is a hero there – everybody speaks about him – and I was also in America, where he is greatly admired. Here in Italy we are in the middle of an election and he is someone that everyone looks up to. He is much loved here and quoted all the time."

LADY POWELL
Evening Standard

Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

TV

Coronation Street Special (ITV1)

Farewell Mike (ITV1)

COMMERCIAL television is currently running a series of ads punning on the name of its banker programme. The familiar northern corporation street-sign is shown with its central word slightly changed.

"Confrontation Street" reads one. "Manipulation Street" jokes another. The aim is to hold on to new viewers attracted or brought back by the series' latest storyline, in which knicker millionaire Mike Baldwin was written out after 30 years. Apart from being a very weak piece of wordplay, "Manipulation Street" has the drawback of being rather too near the truth for the dramatic methods employed during the pant baron's leaving week. Soap opera likes to pretend to be a no-nonsense, salt-of-the-earth format; but the devices and tone employed throughout the bloomer tycoon's departure were as solemn and pretentious as anything to be found on the theatrical fringe in the '60s.

The **Coronation Street** episode in which Mike's briefs life ended was, get this, modelled on *King Lear*. Aged, shrunken and unshaven, his mind gone, Baldwin, confined to a clinic with Alzheimer's, struggled out on to the blasted heath nearest to Weatherfield, wandering through a storm in his pyjamas. Contracting pneumonia, he was returned to intensive care before absconding again, finally dying from a heart attack out on Granada TV's studio-faked cobbled streets, before dying in the arms of his poor fool, Ken Barlow.

Well, the lads and lasses on the media studies course at Salford Tech will get a grand essay on Shakespearean patterning in popular TV drama out of this; but there are a number of problems with the conceit. The largest of these is that, whatever Johnny Briggs happens to do as an actor now he's freed of the Baldwin role, it's long odds that anyone will hire him to play Lear. Frankly, the demon king in pantomime might be a stretch.

But then the fans of the *Street* have always maintained that the writing is a long way ahead of the acting. Yet, even here, the show-off episode was lacking. When Ken, on his mobile, calls an ambulance for the dying Mike, he tells the unseen ambulance despatcher: "Coronation Street... no, no number... we're out on the Street itself."

Which is a nice bit of poetic writing, poignantly establishing the phrase "The Street" as Baldwin's place of death, but daft at a realistic level because the men are directly in front of Ken's house and it would be much more useful to give the emergency services the number of the building behind them. After all, the 999 line couldn't be expected to know that Coronation Street is just a few houses long on a Lancashire lot.

There were also signs in the valedictory edition of how the production values are being stretched by ITV's demand for more and more episodes with bigger and bigger themes. Stumbles on lines were left in and, when a character in a factory scene accidentally knocked over a bobbin during a scene, the take made it to air. Admirers will claim that these imperfections are intended to suggest realism but they look like a production line under pressure.

Even so, the real palaver began as the episode ended. The usual signature tune over the credits was dropped. This is TV drama's equivalent of black arm-bands, a mark of respect for a particularly grave moment. Unfortunately, these conventions were established in less commercial days and so the silence was immediately followed by the cheery ping of the Cadbury Flake logo popping up. The soap's sponsors weren't going to miss out on the enlarged audience tuning in for Mike's final show.

This moment of bathos showed the risk of treating a character's departure as if it were an actual tragedy. And the problem's worsened when Mike, fittingly for the time of year if nothing else, was immediately resurrected. **Farewell Mike**, an extra peak-time programme, began with the actor, looking well and as semi-alive as he usually managed, standing in front of the Rovers Return, and inviting us on a journey of "the street which, for 30 years, has been my home".

The ludicrous pomposity of the exercise was shown by the captions identifying the cast. "Elizabeth Dawn, MBE" was the tag below the face of the lady who played Vera Duckworth. There were elongated anecdotes about "Annie" (Deirdre) getting out the breath-freshener before her big snog with "Johnny".

A voice-over, in the hectically unfunny style of those TV compilation shows, summarised the Ken-Mike tension like this: "Where Ken was long-johns, Mike went commando." While Deirdre hovered between them, apparently "a nation held its breath". To which the only possible response comes from that other popular drama about an old man going bonkers in the rain. Howl, howl, howl, howl!

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

National Lottery Jet Set, BBC1

Eamonn Holmes: Dizzy Gillespie is famous for playing... what?

Contestant (*after thinking a few seconds*): Basketball.

Sara Cox Show, Radio 1

Cox: Who was the first black manager of an English Premier League side?

Contestant: Ron Atkinson.

Danny Kelly Show, Radio WM

Kelly: Which French Mediterranean town hosts a famous film festival every year?

Contestant: I don't know. I need a clue.

Kelly: OK. What do beans come in?

Contestant: Cartons?

MEDIA NEWS

ANOTHER triumph for the relaunched Sky News service and its trendy focus on viewer interactivity *(Eyes passim)*.

When wild fires broke out on Dorset's Canford Heath last month, the channel was under pressure to beat its rolling news rivals to broadcast the first footage. With no camera on the ground, Sky screened a photo, apparently taken by a member of the public, of wild animals cowering in the face of the raging blaze. The on-air anchor boasted: "We have actually got some pretty dramatic pictures our viewers have sent in."

Whoops! Sky had been hoaxed. The photo in question was of a fire in Montana nearly six years ago. A reader of the *Guardian*, which published the picture after seeing it on Sky, pointed out that the discerning eye could have been expected to spot that this was not a scene from the British countryside – one of the animals was an elk.

A NOVEL service is available for staff at BBC human resources distressed by the news that their jobs are to be "outsourced" to Crapita: a helpline that will allow them to share their worries.

The scheme is endorsed by the BBC's chief medical officer, who says it supplies "real benefits". But some staff have their doubts.

First, the service is not confidential. Referrals are "manager-led", which means that staff who are dismayed by Crapita must first speak to... suits on Crapita's own payroll in order to be referred.

Worse, the BBC's occupational health department, which is responsible for running the scheme, has itself been outsourced to – well, you guessed it.

No doubt this will all come out in the wash when Radio 4's *File on Four* investigates the disaster-prone outsourcer (see *Eye* 1156) later this month. But some bits of the BBC know all about Crapita already.

At the BBC Action Line, based in Glasgow, Crapita-employed call centre workers have complained about being told to keep calls to just two minutes 20 seconds. Just the thing to deal with all those "if you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this programme" inquiries from distraught viewers dealing with terminal illness, bereavement and other traumas.

MEANWHILE, as Siemens bids to buy up BBC Scotland's entire engineering department, Crapita is hoping to add the Beeb's engineering training unit to its list of prizes.

If all goes well, BBC engineers will be trained by one private company and work for another while keeping the "public service broadcaster" on air.

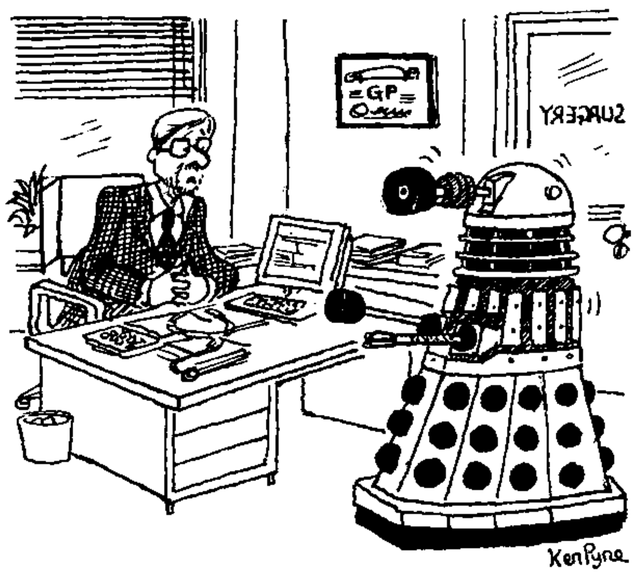
ITV News continues to impress its dwindling audience with a series of ever more feeble "scoops".

"Tonight, ITV News has learned that there could there be 600 Taliban suicide bombers lining up to kill British troops," revealed Alastair Stewart, a mere weeks after a story appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* headlined: "I have 600 suicide bombers waiting for your soldiers."

The late ITV News piece was not actually gathered by an ITV journo but "a respected Pakistani journalist, working for ITV News" – a freelancer whose film was neither new nor exclusive, accompanied as he was by *Sunday Telegraph* scribes when he interviewed the warlord keen to boast to as many infidel journalists as he could get away with.

ITV News broadcast his threat even though it could not confirm the man's identity or the validity of his claims. Stewart reminded viewers that there was "no independent confirmation" of anything they had just seen or heard.

Still, at least the Taliban (if indeed it was them) bagged a double helping of uncorroborated propaganda.



"You're not the doctor I had last time!"

WHEN BBC Radio 2 moved to its new state-of-the-art studios recently, presenters were assured that everything had been thought of.

So they were dismayed to find that no clocks seemed to have been installed. In fact they had – but behind the presenter's head, rendering them useless for the all-important time checks.

THE timing of the World Service's closure of 11 language strands – including the Thai service just as Thailand is undergoing a major constitutional crisis and a Muslim rebellion in the south – could not have been worse.

But that doesn't explain why many disillusioned BBC producers and others involved with English programmes that have also been cut – like *In Praise of God*, *Everywoman*, *Calling The Falklands* and *Pick of the World* – decided to boycott the official party to mark their closure and "celebrate" their achievements.

Host at the sparsely attended gathering was Phil Harding, also known as "the smiling assassin". Before he settles into comfortable retirement with an index-linked BBC pension, the ex-editor of Radio 4's *Today* programme and ex-head of Radio Five Live seems to be pulling down the structure of Bush House like Samson in the Temple to make it virtually a news and current affairs network only.

Harding had to be briefed before he made his speech about the programmes he had axed and had to talk about. He then promptly forgot to mention *Pick of the World*, the World Service version of *Pick of the Week*, and had to be prompted. You can imagine how well this went down with the few who had bothered to turn up.

I - I - I

JONATHAN Ross hasn't been backward in coming forward to discuss his rival chat show host, the much-derided Davina McCall.

On ITV's *This Morning* show, he said: "I'm lucky because I have a wide range of interests and also I have a lot of influence over my show. We don't tend to book people unless I think I'm going to have fun with them and I have something I want to ask them."

Total number of words: 46
Total number of I's: 7
IQ (I Quotient): 15 percent.

JUST FANCY THAT!

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, an episode of *Yes Minister* sent up the large numbers of administrators employed in hospitals. In a summary of the show, the Beeb wrote: "On his way to the Ministry, [Jim Hacker] learns from his chauffeur that there is a new St Edward's Hospital in north London that is staffed with 500 administrators and ancillary workers but has no doctors, nurses or patients." What a great piece of comedy.

Last week, on 6 April, the Press Association reported that a new £6m mental health unit at Weston General Hospital in Somerset may never be opened because the hospital's NHS trust managers have realised that they cannot afford the staff to run it.

FOOTBALL FOCUS

SIMON GREENBERG, formerly a sports hack at the Evening Standard, is now Chelsea FC's Director of Communications. And he has been so good at PR that he has made Chelsea the most hated club in the country.

In March 2005, after Chelsea lost an ill-tempered tie against Barcelona, he briefed the press that "we will be submitting an official complaint to UEFA about an incident that occurred at half-time". UEFA later found that there were no grounds for Chelsea's claim that Barcelona manager Frank Rijkaard entered the referee's changing room in an attempt to influence him. It did, however, find the London club guilty of bringing the game into disrepute because its accusations were so obviously baseless.

There was more of the same in February this year when Chelsea's Arjen Robben hysterically over-reacted to a challenge to ensure a Liverpool opponent was sent off. Speaking on BBC radio, former Chelsea player Pat Nevin criticised Robben and the club for not condemning the player. Shortly after, he received a phone call from the club's hierarchy expressing grave disappointment at his comments, particularly since he was an ex-Blues player. Nevin told them where they could go.

Last month Chelsea played out a niggly match against West Bromwich Albion, complete with the usual histrionics from Mourinho and his players. Yet again Greenberg moved in with a hand-washing briefing: "We felt [West Brom manager] Bryan Robson set the tone for much of this from the first minute. He was insulting our players and our bench virtually from the start." Yet again, the football authorities declined to take the claim seriously and instead charged Chelsea with failing to control its players.

Football - The Chelsea Way

Even the best team needs a hand

A few weeks later, Didier Drogba became the latest Chelsea prima donna to be accused of diving and even admitted as much in a post-match TV interview. When hacks pressed Greenberg and his team for a full videotape of the interview, they were surprised to enjoy full co-operation. Until they looked at the tape: the passage where Drogba admitted cheating had been excised.

Greenberg recently told *PR Week* that he was embarking on a "charm offensive". To do that of course you first have to have some charm...

AD NAUSEAM

WHEN the lavish new Lloyds TSB ad campaign "Day for Night" hits our screens in coming weeks, depicting a group of people wandering in to a mystical sunset, spare a thought for the cast.

Even though the ad's production costs clocked in at more than £500,000, and Lloyds yearly marketing spend is £25m, the 50 disgruntled extras on set at Pinewood Studios were paid £90 for their work, not including travel expenses and their agents' commission. Presumably Lloyds' ad agency Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe/Y&R and the production company Knucklehead did a little better.

DESPITE being 56 years old and married with two children, it would appear that Richard Branson wants the world to know that he is still a hugely sexual animal.

Last week at the press launch for NTL and Virgin Mobile's new coupling, Branson was insistent that the company's so-called quadruple-play offering (mobile, landline, internet and TV) should be known as "Four-play". The pun was mercilessly flogged, too, with Branson rolling out the one-liners such as "with the power of four-play we should be able to expand", before changing the slogan "quad-play" to "4-play" on the wall behind him.

For an example of the four-play our bearded lothario prefers, one need only look to Australia, where Virgin is currently running a viral ad for its Virgin Loans. Branson appears naked in a Jacuzzi with a similarly-exposed model under each arm. Towards the end of the ad a third model appears from under the water, and it is fairly clear that it is not the jacuzzi she has been servicing.

TOURISM Australia's "So Where the Bloody Hell Are You?" ads caused a stink at the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre last month and were subsequently banned in Britain, prompting the Australian Tourism Minister Fran Bailey to opine: "The regulators have clearly misplaced their sense of humour – and this from the country that brought us Benny Hill, the *Two Ronnies* and *Little Britain*."

Fair dinkum, you might say, except that when a spoof of their own ad appeared – an online spot that reminded the Australians of the recent Cronulla race-riots and their record on refugees, altering the sign-off to "So where the fucking hell are you?" – Tourism Australia failed to see the funny side. Downwind Media, which produced the parody, was threatened with legal action. Ms Bailey had said previously that: "Based on our research the British are loving our cheeky sense of humour." A shame, then, that Tourism Australia isn't loving ours.

SUPERMODELS KERBER

AGENCY
OH NAOMI, THAT JACKET'S SOOOO TOTALLY YOU!!!
IT'S YOUR STYLE, YOUR LOOK.... ...IT'S JUST.....YOU!!!
IT SHOULD KEEP MISS CAMPBELL FROM HURTING ANYONE
STRAIT-JACKETS 'R' US

DOING THE ROUNDS

IN 1997, M.D. argued that is was "negligent in the extreme" not to fortify flour with folic acid to prevent neural tube defects (NTDs) like spina bifida (*Eye* 930). Nine years later, the Food Standards Agency is preparing a briefing paper favouring fortification, but inviting a 12-week public consultation before recommending action to ministers.

While the government dithers, 900 pregnancies a year are affected by spina bifida, a third of which result in termination. Half of these could be prevented.

In spina bifida, the bones do not close round the spinal cord and the nerves can bulge out on the unborn baby's back and become damaged. This happens very early on in pregnancy – often before a woman even knows she is pregnant. The evidence that folic acid can prevent this has been around since 1991, when the Medical Research Council's Vitamin Study Group showed that the incidence of NTDs could be reduced by 75 percent if all pregnant women took 400 micrograms each day from before conception to the end of the 12th week of pregnancy.

Given that half of all pregnancies are unplanned, and only a third of people can remember to take tablets effectively, exhorting women to take daily folic acid supplements was never going to prevent NTDs. So what did the Conservative government do? It sent leaflets to GPs to remind women to take folic acid.

By 1996, only 9 percent of UK women new about folic acid. The US Center for Disease Control recognised that health education and tablets would never deliver a significant reduction in NTDs, especially since their prevalence is greatest among the young and poor who don't plan pregnancies and are less aware of health issues. American food manufacturers were ordered to add folic acid to flour and a variety of staple foodstuffs as the only realistic chance of prevention. This came into effect from January 1998, and Canada and Chile followed suit. In these countries, there has been a 30 to 50 percent drop in NTDs.

Back in the UK, the Tories hired Zoë Wannamaker to voice-over a TV commercial. Sophie Grigson was stuck in front of piles of green vegetables extolling the virtues of folate-rich foods. Alas, cooking vegetables destroys their folate. Even in raw form, you'd need to eat a mountain of sprouts a day to absorb the 400mcg needed. Unfortified diets can never deliver enough folate to make an impact.

Most pregnant women now know about folic acid; but only 1 in 10 manage to take it correctly. It is already added to many breads and cereals, and increasing the level in flour would not significantly mask Vitamin B12 deficiency in the elderly, one argument levelled against its introduction. Since 1991 there have been 4,500 babies born with NTDs who could easily have been prevented, and 2,250 needless terminations. Both the Tories and Labour, wary of the nanny state tag, have destroyed lives with their inaction.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

SIGNAL FAILURES

STAGECOACH and Virgin have stopped claiming to have bought new trains which were paid for by banks and subsidised by taxpayers (Eye 1117), but old habits die hard.

A self-congratulatory press advert by Stagecoach's South West Trains boasts of "investment" in a "new station at Chandlers (sic) Ford and other major improvements". If fact Chandler's Ford station, opened in May 2003, was funded by Hampshire council, ie by taxpayers; and the train service, a shuttle from Romsey to Southampton, is covered by a £3.3m grant to SWT for three years, again courtesy of taxpayers.

Despite the public generosity, SWT showed itself ungrateful. While most retailers charge low prices for new products, SWT charged 56 percent more to travel to Southampton from Chandler's Ford than the fare to Southampton from Romsey, five miles further up the line. Under pressure, SWT then grudgingly cut the Chandler's Ford fare; but by then many who had tried the new station may well have decided the train was a rip-off and never returned.

The adjective "major" usually describes big projects like new high-speed lines; but in England a tiny new station platform now apparently constitutes a "major improvement" to be marvelled at years later.

Virgin Trains, meanwhile, is also slapping itself on the back. Richard Branson was delighted to announce that more than 90 percent of Virgin's west-coast trains were on time in February, for the first time ever. "We are now delivering our promises. Well done all round," gushed Beardie, forgetting that he promised 90 percent punctuality nine years ago.

Virgin Trains chief Tony Collins told *Modern Railways* magazine that Virgin and Stagecoach (half-owner of Virgin Trains) had "delivered everything that they promised to do, except the 140mph west-coast railway which is a Railtrack legacy issue". Ignoring the fact that 140mph trains were Virgin's idea, the *sole* reason Virgin won both its franchises was that its bids promised the lowest cost. Virgin said it would pay more than £1bn in premium (at 1997 prices) for the west-coast franchise; instead it's swallowed huge bailouts. Collins explains that away by saying that Virgin now pays higher track charges to Network Rail; but the 1997 deal was based on Virgin paying the premium *and* part-funding upgrading through bigger payments to Railtrack, NR's predecessor.

Collins boasted: "The only players who take any risks… are us. We take all the revenue risk." For four years Virgin Trains has been on a "management contract" where taxpayers cover costs and pay Virgin a "fee", ie a guaranteed profit. So the risk, as ever, lies with the public.

LESS than a month after civil engineer Nick Jeffries was cleared of all charges brought against him following the 2000 Hatfield derailment which killed four, he was sacked by his employer, Network Rail (NR).

Its decision to dismiss 56-year-old Mr Jeffries for "gross misconduct" apparently had nothing to do with Hatfield, however. It was because following his acquittal he gave an interview to *New Civil Engineer Magazine*, where the worst criticism he had of his employer was that it had always been supportive of him. Mr Jeffries' crime, in Network Rail's eyes, was that he had not obtained permission to give the interview.

Mr Jeffries, who worked for subcontractor Balfour Beatty at the time of the accident, had been covering for a senior engineer who had earlier suffered a breakdown. Balfour Beatty was ultimately fined a record £10m for what the Hatfield trial judge described as "the worst example of sustained industrial negligence in a high-risk industry I have ever seen".

Mr Jeffries was the only one of five individuals to be charged with manslaughter and health and safety breaches to go into the witness box. After living under a cloud for so long, he had wanted to tell his side of the story more fully. In the meantime he had gone to work for Amey in 2002, whose rail engineering work was taken over in July 2004 by Network Rail, itself a replacement for Railtrack whose dire maintenance regime had led to the Hatfield disaster. At the end of the trial Network Rail was fined £3.5m for what the judge described as Railtrack's many "lamentable failings".

NR bosses will argue at an industrial tribunal that it ended Jeffries' 39-year career because, without permission, he had sought to question publicly the decision to prosecute him for something which occurred when he worked for another company. Whispers from insiders that NR simply didn't want anyone associated with Hatfield on its books are clearly wide of the mark.

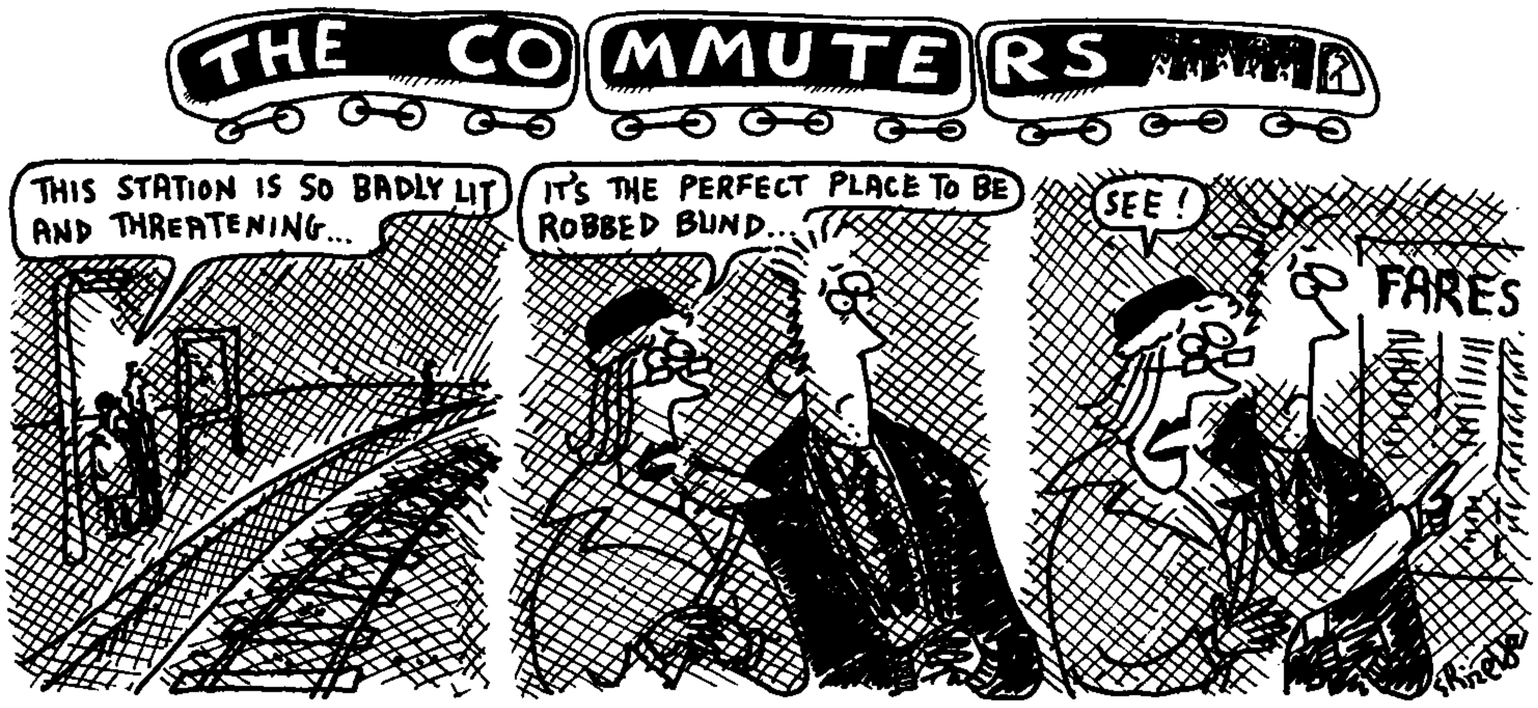
HOW PUBLIC CONSULTATION WORKS

June 2005: Transport Department launches "consultation" *after* inviting final bids for the Greater Western franchise (Eye 1135)

October 2005: Hampshire council responds with "serious reservations" about non-provision for growth, especially on the Portsmouth-Cardiff corridor where Romsey patronage is growing 11 percent a year.

March 2006: Greater Western timetable for 2007 proposes cutting 23 percent of Romsey's mainline services, and many Portsmouth-Cardiff trains may shrink from three carriages to two.

'Dr B. Ching'



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

MALICE IN BLUNDERLAND

THE Labour party is so worried about losing council seats in Sunderland on 4 May it has drafted in the former head of its general election "attack unit", Fraser Kemp, to mastermind the local campaign.

But it may take more than the aggressive spin-doctoring of the Houghton and Washington East MP to save some of the deadbeats who sit on the city council's Labour benches.

Such as cabinet member for "resources", Cllr David Allan, who is also branch secretary of the Sunderland West branch of the trade union Amicus. Recently Amicus members who had dutifully paid their subs to Allan were surprised to get letters from head office telling them they were in arrears.

At least £2,000 is currently unaccounted for, as is £400 rent on the council-owned hall where the branch has its meetings. Regional Amicus officials have, with some reluctance, asked the union's national executive committee to suspend Allan until he can account for the missing dosh. The union's north-east regional secretary, Davey Hall, has said that allegations against Allan will be investigated. Hall, who happens to be a long-standing drinking buddy of Allan, has also said, before any investigation has taken place, that the allegations are "spurious" – so it'll clearly be a thorough and impartial inquiry. Amicus has, unsurprisingly, so far resisted members' calls to involve Inspector Knacker.

As, indeed, did the Co-op party in 1986, when Allan was treasurer of the party's Sunderland branch and the branch funds disappeared, along with the books. And as did the Labour party, also in the 1980s, when hundreds of pounds disappeared from the safe of the Sunderland South Labour club, where Allan helped run the bar – a safe to which Allan held one of only two keys. So why should anything be any different in 2006?

In an email reply to questions from the *Eye*, Cllr Allan said: "I am aware of these allegations which are all untrue and maliciously based. I do not intend to comment further on this matter."

●*More Sunderland Labour deadbeats next issue.*

BLURRED:VISION

THERE are plenty of arenas for lively political debate on the internet, but the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's new Local:Vision [*sic*] forum isn't one of them.

The website, supposedly intended to enable public debate of local government reform, was launched by local government minister David Miliband last month. "New technology gives us new opportunities to engage with more people than ever before," announced Miliband.

A splendid 45 more people, in fact, as the *Eye* went to press. Two weeks after the launch, the site had attracted just 80-odd posts, many from local councillors, with some posting on more than one of the four available topics. The 80 also included several comments from members of the ODPM consultation team, scolding people for using the forum to complain about their local authorities and asking for comments to be "more constructive".

Meanwhile readers of Miliband's blog on the ODPM website quizzed the minister over how much his site had cost. "Design, configuration and integration" into ODPM's website had cost £6,000, he wrote. Commented one reader: "You were nicely taken to the cleaners there."

VILE NEV'S BACK

BEFORE Call Me Dave says anything more about the "fruitcakes and loonies and closet racists" of Ukip, perhaps he should pay more attention to some of the fruitcakes and loonies and out-of-the-closet racists in his own party.

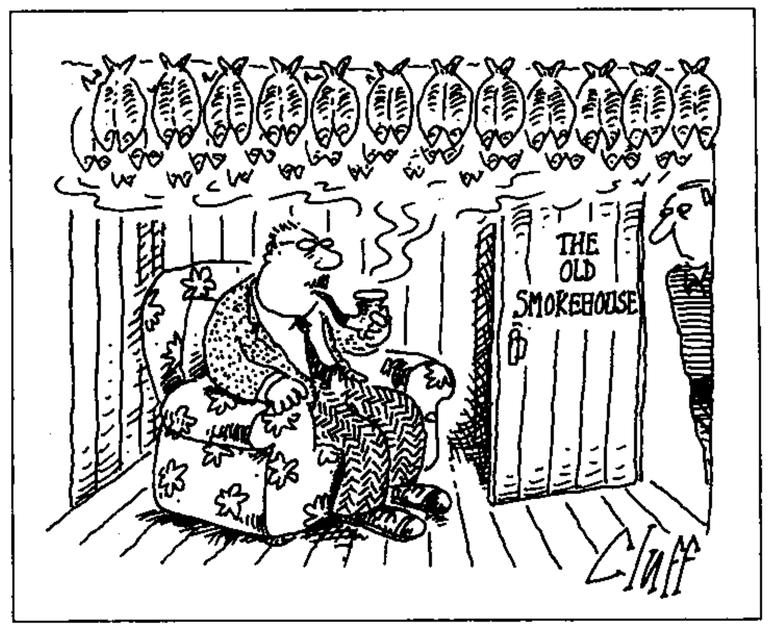
Eye readers will recall how in 2004 Neville Sanders, the former Conservative leader of Peterborough City Council, was banned by the Standards Board from holding public office for two years for making "deeply offensive, insensitive and crass" remarks about the Irish.

Conservative central office had no hesitation in kicking Sanders out of the party. He was later runner-up for this column's sought-after Tory Bigot of the Year award.

Last year, however, the high court overturned Sanders' ban, because he had been re-elected (as an independent) in 2004. The verdict of the electorate, however stupid, should take precedence over that of an unelected body, said the judge.

Last week Peterborough Conservatives issued its list of candidates for the May elections. Prominent among them was one Neville Sanders, who was quietly readmitted to the party last November. Just the sort of touchy-feely Tory David Cameron needs!

●TWO days after a million council workers across Britain went on strike over Gordon Brown's great pensions scam, Bryn Parry Jones, chief executive of Pembrokeshire County Council, trousered a £28,000 pay rise. Parry Jones's annual package now totals £169,000 and



has a pension entitlement of £84,500 a year... just £80,800 more than the average pensions of more humble local government workers.

RICHES TO WRAGGES

LATEST councillor to get the chop courtesy of the Standards Board is Ian Croft, former Tory leader of Lincolnshire County Council, who has been banned from public office for 15 months.

Croft succeeded disgraced council leader Jim Speechley (*Eyes passim*) after the latter was jailed for corruptly attempting to alter the route of a bypass for his own benefit. Last week the adjudication panel concluded that Croft, a long-standing crony of Speechley, had "engineered" the removal of the council's "exemplary" chief executive, David Bowles, as an act of revenge after Bowles had exposed Speechley's corruption. Croft put "his personal friendships above his public obligations", concluded the panel, and acted with a "dominating sense of loyalty" to Speechley.

Croft's cronyism has left the taxpayer with a bill for more than £580,000. That includes Bowles's £400,000 payoff and £168,000 paid to law firm Wragge & Co, whose advice Croft had sought on the best way to get shot of Bowles.

●A PRIZE piece of managementspeak from Newcastle City Council, which has opened a new customer service centre in the city's Kenton district, featuring something called a "corporate touchdown space". Baffled, the ward's councillor, Stephen Lambert, inquired what this might be. A "corporate touchdown space" turns out to be what people who don't work in local government call an "office".

HIGH PRINCIPALS

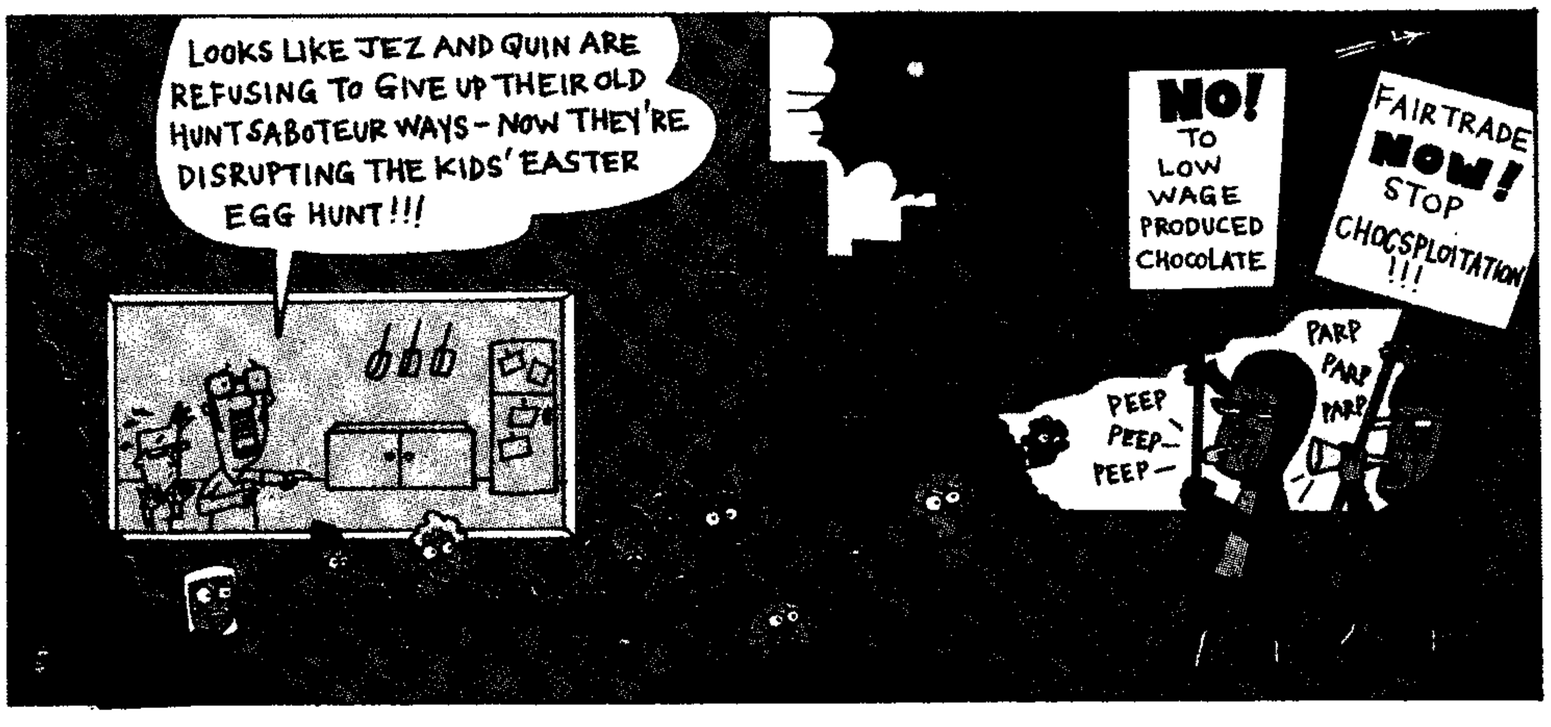
HARD on the heels of its takeover of foundation courses in Sussex (*Eye* 1149), the *Daily Mail*-owned Study Group is about to grab several similar courses at Northumbria University. Horrified lecturers say both jobs and teaching standards will be at risk if university governors sign off on the deal, as planned, later this month.

The courses to be farmed out to the company were previously provided by the university's own English Language Centre (ELC), preparing foreign language students for postgraduate courses in subjects like engineering and business. The ELC has, funnily enough, just made 28 staff redundant and reduced support for overseas students. Staff have been forced to compete for the remaining jobs, many at lower grades than their old posts. They suspect the slimming down was intended to make the centre a better prospect for privatisation.

Study Group is better known in the UK under the names of two of its companies, Embassy CES and Bellerbys colleges. Bellerbys ran into trouble in 2004 after claiming to an undercover *Sunday Times* reporter that it could guarantee a university place to a foreign student completing one of its £15,000 courses. Despite the furious denials of the "partner universities" that they would offer guaranteed places to Bellerbys' students, the Embassy CES website currently advertises "a university place – guaranteed".

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


LOOKS LIKE JEZ AND QUIN ARE REFUSING TO GIVE UP THEIR OLD HUNTSABOTEUR WAYS - NOW THEY'RE DISRUPTING THE KIDS' EASTER EGG HUNT!!!
NO! TO LOW WAGE PRODUCED CHOCOLATE
FAIRTRADE NOW! STOP CHOCSPLOITATION !!!
PEEP PEEP PEEP
PARP PARP PARP

NOOKS and CORNERS

TWO WEEKS ago, Lewisham Borough Council suddenly closed the swimming pools in Forest Hill in south-east London on health and safety grounds. Part of the main roof truss was found to be rotten. This was scarcely surprising: the building is just over 120 years old and has been scandalously (deliberately?) neglected by the council for years.

In 1996 it tried to close the Forest Hill Pools, and only reprieved them after the roof over the swimming pool at Downham – also owned by Lewisham – collapsed later that year. Oddly enough, the closure of the much-used Forest Hill Pools came shortly after a public consultation exercise which strongly supported the option of refurbishing them rather than the council's favoured course of building a new swimming pool on the site.

Lewisham is apparently prepared to spend £4.1m on refurbishing the building – a new pool was to cost £4.7m – but what is depressing is that the council seems to have no appreciation of how attractive and special it is. Designed by Wilson, Son & Aldwinckle and opened in 1885, the Forest Hill Pools now seem to be the oldest surviving working public swimming pool in London. Although altered, behind the brick "Queen Anne" façade the original First Class pool retains its side galleries and is a particularly enjoyable place to swim. The scandal of the Forest Hill Pools is part of a much wider pattern of irresponsibility. Swimming pools are expensive to run, and for several decades local authorities all over Britain have been closing small local pools in favour of a few big new leisure centres, run by private companies and often only accessible by car. The most notorious case is that of the whizzy new Clissold Baths, designed by cutting-edge High-Tec architects Hodder Associates, which opened in 2002 overdue and, at £31m, way over budget and then closed within a few months. The lawsuit between Hackney council, the architects and the contractors has now been settled, but the pool remains closed. Six perfectly good local pools were closed to make way for Hackney's showpiece; one, the magnificent (listed) Haggerston Pool, designed by Alfred W.S. Cross, the *doyen* of Edwardian swimming pool architects, and opened in 1904, lies empty, an attempt by the council to sell the site to developers having been thwarted.

Then there is the exciting new Peckham Pulse which opened in 1998 next door to Will Alslob's award-winning Peckham Library. Southwark council tried to close the old Camberwell Baths, but today it is still possible to swim at Camberwell though not at the Peckham Pulse, for technical problems soon resulted in its closure. It remains closed.

All of which suggests that public money invested in maintaining old swimming pools is better spent than the millions local authorities have poured into High Tec flops like Clissold Baths. More to the point, keeping smaller local pools open enables more people to swim. But this is the policy of neither local nor central government, which is pouring public money – much of it to be siphoned off from funds for art galleries, museums, historic buildings and suchlike – into the wretched Olympic Games. But building new stadia and Olympic pools in the Lea Valley is not much use to people elsewhere.

Nor is the problem confined to London. Five of Bristol's 10 pools have been closed in the last year. And then there is the case of the Victoria Baths closed by Manchester City Council, which "won" in the BBC's first television *Restoration* series – and on which restoration work has yet to begin.

Fortunately, local groups in London fighting for their swimming pools have come together as the London Pools Campaign. This is calling for a public and affordable pool within a quarter of an hour's walk for all Londoners. And this accords with Sport England's policy of having one pool per 30,000 population, which means that London needs 233 public pools – twice as many as exist in use today. But as the campaign points out, pools are discretionary in council budgets and so "not safe in the borough council's hands". That is certainly true of Lewisham, which spent £1.9m refurbishing the Ladywell Pools and now wants to close them and build a school on the site, leaving only two swimming pools open in the borough.

So what should be done? As regards the Forest Hill Pools, the building should be listed as many argue, and then carefully repaired, and modernised where necessary. It is a national scandal that public swimming pools, many of them originally built by public-spirited authorities under the 1846 Baths & Wash-Houses Act, should be casually abandoned and sold off as assets to be stripped. First public libraries were squeezed, then playing fields sold off. Now swimming pools. What do local authorities think they are for?

'Piloti'

I-SPY

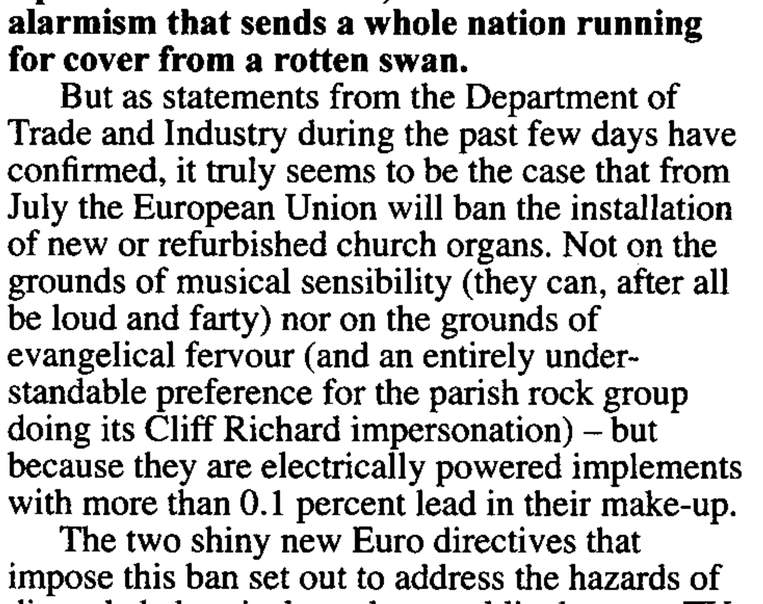
New Zealand.

Submitted by Andrew Noble.

Sheffield.

Submitted by Edward Russell.

£10 paid for similar submissions.
(SAE required for return of photographs)



MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WHEN the story broke it sounded like an April Fool – or at worst, the kind of neurotic alarmism that sends a whole nation running for cover from a rotten swan.

But as statements from the Department of Trade and Industry during the past few days have confirmed, it truly seems to be the case that from July the European Union will ban the installation of new or refurbished church organs. Not on the grounds of musical sensibility (they can, after all be loud and farty) nor on the grounds of evangelical fervour (and an entirely understandable preference for the parish rock group doing its Cliff Richard impersonation) – but because they are electrically powered implements with more than 0.1 percent lead in their make-up.

The two shiny new Euro directives that impose this ban set out to address the hazards of discarded electrical goods on public dumps – TV sets, fridges, boilers – and we know that their Euro authors weren't thinking beyond those terms because they said so in the preparatory debates. But as the directives have ended up, they are sweepingly worded to cover just about anything that runs on electricity – including church organs, whose lead pipes often exceed 50 percent of the total material. So: banned from July. And what a great story of bureaucratic bungling it makes. The kind you read and laugh about, and assume that everything gets sorted in the end when reason prevails.

The only problem here is that it looks as though it won't, thanks to the DTI. Instead of siding with good sense and issuing the calming "Don't worry, we'll deal with this" statements you'd expect, the department is being totally defeatist. The directives have been passed, it says. There's nothing it can do except "prepare to apply" them. And the most it's offering the organ world is that individual churches may seek special exemption – but with the proviso that any exemption will only last four years. After which, presumably, the organ will have to be removed.

Given the costs of installing and refurbishing an organ, which can be hundreds of thousands, this is absurd. Given the cultural significance of organ music in church worship, it's grotesque. But unless some senior pen-pushers in Trade & Industry change their tune, it will happen. No exaggeration. No April Fooling. And with especially worrying consequences for St Paul's, Salisbury and Worcester cathedrals where the organs are all in the current process of refurbishment. If work in each case isn't finished by July, expect that rock band to move in on choral evensong.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Letters

Custody scandal

Sir,

Corporate manslaughter legislation has been promised but not delivered for nine years, and now Home Office Minister Fiona MacTaggart has rejected demands to introduce the possibility of criminal charges against directors (Private Eye, 1155, Corporate Killing: Collar and sty, page 27).

Private Eye is right to say that youths, protesters and others, have felt the full force of Labour's draconian crime policies, but wrong in stating that "one group remains untouchable: directors of the largest companies".

The decision to exempt the Prison Service, another "untouchable" group, is morally reprehensible. The number of deaths in custody is a scandal, yet it is unclear where responsibility lies. Prisoners are held accountable for their wrongs, so why shouldn't someone be held to account when inmates die while in the "care" and custody of the state? Does the Prison Service fear accountability, and worry that some deaths might be traced back to the negligence or incompetence of staff, and lead to lawsuits?

My daughter Sarah, 18, was the youngest of six women who died in the "care" of Styal Prison in the 12 months ending August 2003. Deborah Coles, co-director of the campaigning organisation INQUEST, has described these deaths as "a clear example of corporate manslaughter", yet no-one has been held to account.

The absence of a powerful sanction in dealing with death at the hands of the state remains problematic. My daughter was convicted of a non-violent offence, sent to prison on 17 January 2003, and died the next day. But, three years after the death of my only child, there is still no formal acceptance by the Home Office that they have a responsibility for her death, even though the inquest jury said a "failure in the duty of care" had contributed to her death, and there had been "avoidable delays" in summoning the ambulance.

Yours faithfully,
PAULINE CAMPBELL,

Via email.

Pisspoor epistle

Sir,

In sympathy with ASLEF's campaign for corporate manslaughter to be made a criminal offence, I emailed Charles Clarke to ask when such legislation would be introduced. Attached is the concise and considered reply I received.

Who says the government doesn't listen?

Yours,
TIM CHARLESWORTH,

Via email.

Home Office

Mr Tim Charlesworth
Rail Passebger (&voter)

Reference: T14861/6

Dear Mr Charlesworth,

Thank you for your e-mail of 28/03/06 08:55:33 about

Name

Satanic panic

Sir,

I would not take Sara Scott's work as refutation of anything (Joan Coleman's letter, Eye 1155). Moreover, the absence of independent evidence for the sexual abuse of children in demonic rituals alleged in this country was echoed in surveys undertaken by people in the USA, Australia and Holland; why should Britain be different?

JEAN LA FONTAINE,

Anthropology Dept, LSE, London WC2.

Shoot from the lip

Sir,

In Eye 1155, Square Basher wants to know "what the rules of engagement are if British supply convoys are attacked" whilst in Pakistan and reports that the silence on the matter from his superiors has been deafening.

Perhaps an old soldier can be of assistance.

The silence in this situation is an indication of tacit approval for a course of action that cannot be officially sanctioned – ie if you are attacked, for God's sake, shoot at the fuckers.

I should have thought this was rather obvious. The modern military man is a strange beast indeed.

Yours,
BRIGADIER (RTD)
HARRY COYOTE,

Farnham.

Lookalike

Etruscan satyr

Sir Tom Jones

Sir,

These two gentlemen are known to have been responsible for several episodes of Pan-demonium among certain of their respective female devotees.

Surely one knight is enough?

Satyrically yours
ANGELA SAGE,

Cheshire.

Crapita punishment

Sir,

As you say, Crapita is capable of incompetence at all levels. It runs the teachers' pension scheme. A few months ago I had to update my employment record with them. Just weeks after the matter was satisfactorily concluded, I received a document telling me that I did not qualify for a pension. I searched for the address, thinking said document must have come from a different office. But no, it had come from the very same building.

Capita – specialists in IT and communications are they?

A. TEACHER,

Via email.

Kurt rejoinder

Sir,

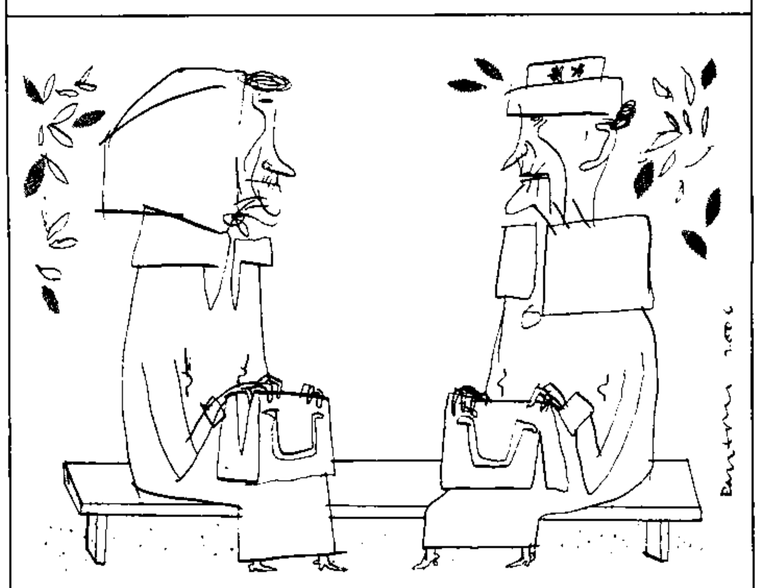
Bookworm embarrassingly revealed to everyone the depth of his ignorance in Eye 1155 in his review of Kurt Vonnegut's new book by sneering at the supposedly vacuous line "We do, doodley do, doodley do, doodley do, what we must, muddily must..."

As any pisspoor college rag reviewer might know, this is a line from Vonnegut's classic Cat's Cradle, from the sacred texts of Bokonon, probably the greatest religion ever invented by man. Maybe Bookworm should stop trying to prove how clever he is and actually read some books.

Nice, nice, very nice...
ALUN SIMPSON,

Gifu City, Japan.

Scenes You Seldom See



"What I like about the modern world is the way everything keeps changing all the time"

LUVVIES

"James Dean said to me when I was young, 'The giant sequoia tree in its beginning is very small inside but the bark is very large. The bark is a foot thick but doesn't get bigger. The bark is there to allow the inside to grow. An actor is like that'. Every time you do an emotional scene, you're exposing yourself. The second the scene's over, you have to shut it back down and put your bark back on. If you walk around with it, you're just a wounded tree – you're going to die, because there's just too much stuff coming into you."

DENNIS HOPPER,
New Yorker

Submitted by Harry Mount.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Organ grinder

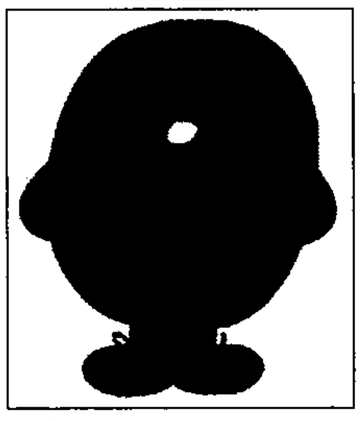
Sir,

Re: Music & Musicians (Eye 1155). RCO members would have been more supportive of the Royal College of Organists' £8m Birmingham project had the £750,000 organ budget been spent on a British instrument instead of a Swiss import. Jobs for Our Boys, I say!

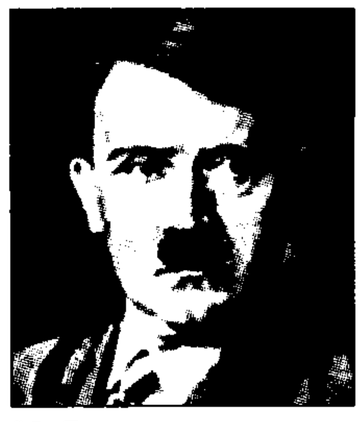
Yours patriotically,
CHRIS NICKOL B.Mus, FRCO, ARCM,

Via email.

Lookalike



Hitler



Mr Fussy

Sir,

Are Adolf Hitler and Mr Fussy by any chance related? I think we should be told. Do I win £10? (No, Ed.)

Yours aye,
MR I SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON THE INTERNET,

Via email.

ERYC idol

Sir,

So Piloti (Eye 1155) believes the Voluntary Conservation Advisory Committees in the East Riding fulfil a satisfactory and expert source of advice to the planning process and needn't be replaced by a professional paid design panel? I'd be interested to know if his advice and comment on planning issues comes free of charge to the Eye and whether his professional (I suppose he does have relevant qualifications) opinions could not equally well be replaced by a panel of volunteers.

I think by his own reasoning they could and that Nooks & Corners would benefit from his disbandment along with the continual axe-grinding he indulges in against ERYC.

His accusation of culpability re Elmswell Old Hall is mistaken. The council members took considerable advice (often conflicting) from groups such as English Heritage and debated ways forward on more than one occasion. Finally the whole council agreed that, as surveys indicated considerable costs associated with the stabilising and reconstruction of a heavily degraded building, it was more in the public interest to agree access with the landowner and conserve the site and remaining fabric as an historic ruin and educational amenity. I believe that was a sensible decision. Though other opinions were expressed a majority view prevailed so whatever Piloti thinks of the council he is wrong to identify democratic with "wretched".

Yours truly,
JIM WHITFIELD,

Beverley Town Councillor.

Lookalike

Humphrey

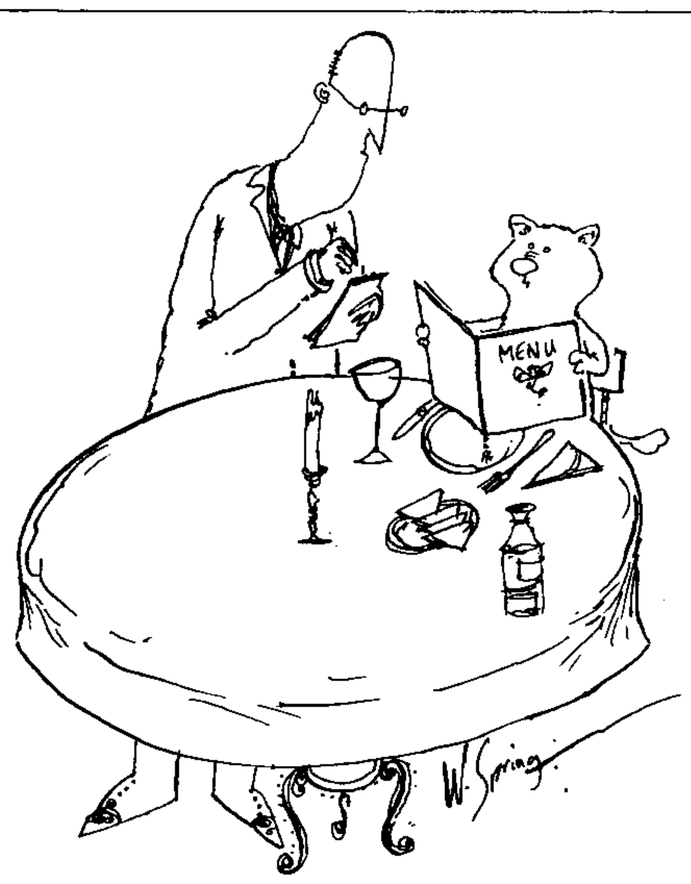
Tiddles

Sir,

I have recently been repeatedly struck by the remarkable similarity between Humphrey, the late Downing Street cat, and my own cat, Tiddles. I wonder if by any chance they could be related?

Yours,
A. CAT OWNER,

Dorset.



"Oh, you just assume, because I'm a cat, I'm only interested in the fish menu! Well, for your information, I'm very tempted by the cassoulet of beans... I will, however, be having the fish tonight"

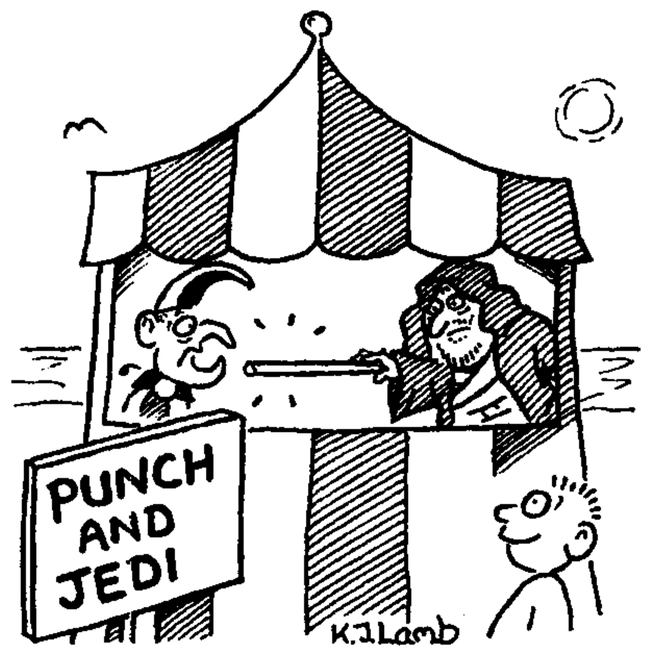
Tied up in Notts

Sir,

"Donors Kebabed" (Eye 1155) says that Nigel Doughty "is usually referred to as the chairman of Notts Forest". Not the case. Mr Doughty is in fact chairman of **Nottingham** *Forest, the smaller of the city's two sides, and has nothing to do with the giant of Nottingham football across the river, Notts* **County**. *It might not seem important, but it is.*

Yours in sport,
STEVE WAKELIN,

London.



Prudenczzzzzz...

Sir,

The pedantry on your letters page tends to focus mainly on linguistic disputes, an area some of us find rather tedious. I would therefore like to branch out into the thrilling world of macroeconomics and make a correction to your Budget Special (Eye 1155, p26).

Gordon Brown's "golden rule" was indeed self-imposed, but it does not state that public sector debt (PSNCR) should stay within 40 percent of GDP, and in fact the PSNCR at present is only about £32bn, which is a small fraction of 40 percent of GDP. I suspect your correspondent is confusing the PSNCR with total public spending. The golden rule has nothing to do with this 40 percent, but imposes the restriction that public borrowing should only be used to finance capital spending, and should not be used for current spending. This of course should be "over the economic cycle" – the beginning and end of the cycle to be determined by the chancellor himself. The supposed justification for this rule is that capital spending improves the productive potential of the economy, whereas current spending is a drain on resources. It is easy to criticise the "golden rule" on two counts: firstly we have never had one before and it didn't seem to do us any harm; secondly, how is current spending on education and training less productive than capital spending on tanks and planes? The only real reason for this silly rule is to impress the financial markets that Gordon is indeed an iron chancellor, who will not do terrible socialist things like spending more money on welfare.

There, isn't that more exciting than disputes over the Greek meaning of the word crescendo?

Yours faithfully,
MIKE PAINTER,

York.

Forgotten man

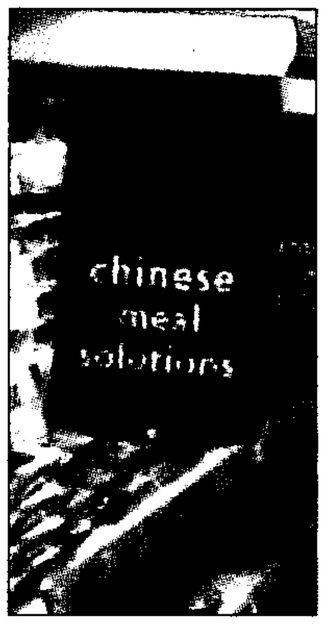
Sir,

You claim "Lloyd George was succeeded by the first Labour government" (Slicker, Eye 1155). In fact, after Lloyd George there was the Conservative Prime Minister Bonar Law. He is known as the forgotten Prime Minister and you have certainly seemed to forget him!

Yours,
CHARLES HIGGIE,

Cheshire.

SOLUTIONS



– Tesco

"Commuting Solutions" – *Bicycle shop*

"TMK, Global Tubular Solutions" – *steel pipes*

"Dunn-Line Passenger Transport Solutions" – *coaches*

"O2's offer of a free Bluetooth wireless headset includes "a convenient carry solution and a flexible carry solution" – *a case and a strap*

All submitted by readers

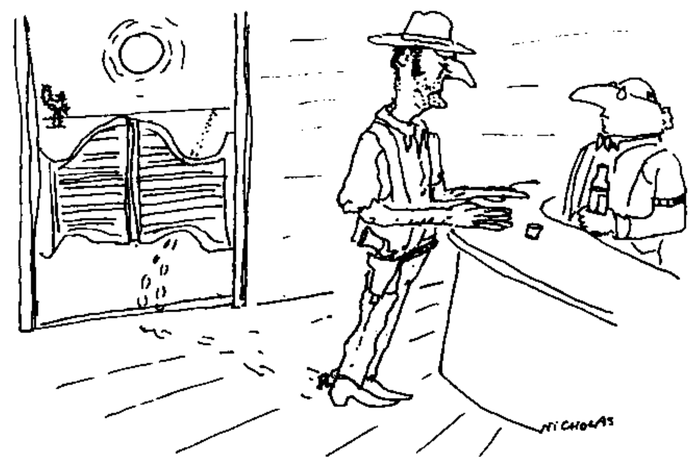
Knight in tarnished armour

Sir,

Sorry, but Silvio Berlusconi is not known as "Il Dottore" as you claim in Street of Shame (Eye 1154). This is a moniker which can generally be used in Italy of anyone who has a degree (and quite a lot who don't but act as though they do). Berlusconi is known as "Il Cavaliere" – the Knight – though heaven knows there are many other more appropriate things to call him.

Yours,
PAUL FLINT,

Madrid, Spain.



"I want to quench my thirst with a small tot of neat whisky, please"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Sheringham's coming on. They broke the mint when they made this one."
Commentator, Match Of The Day, BBC2
(Anthony P. Mullen)

"If Livingston don't keep their discipline the inevitable could happen."
MARK HATELEY, Setanta Sports
(T. McGalpine)

"You won't win silver medals at the Olympic Games unless you're the very very best."
BRENDAN FOSTER, BBC1
(Ian Gillan)

"As soon as Lee Trundle scored that early goal for Swansea you always knew this wasn't going to be a nil-nil draw."
MATT JONES, Sky Sports
(Glyn Berrington)

"I hope it will encourage people to speak out against what they believe in."
SHABINA BEGUM, Radio 4
(Mike Morris)

Letter from **Pristina**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE crumbling prefabricated apartments and satellite dishes of Pristina look somehow lovelier than ever this April – for not only is spring in the air, but independence too.

Since NATO ejected Slobbo in 1999 we've been ruled by the UN's Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK for short). What we really want is a state of our own. In fact it's hard to find a Kosovo Albanian who wants anything else. But the same cannot be said of the couple of hundred thousand Serbs who remain in Kosovo. They don't want independence at all.

Given that NATO originally intervened to protect minorities, it might seem rum to outsiders if the international community were now to leave our Serb brethren to fend for themselves in an independent, 90 percent Albanian state. Especially since Albanian "extremists" occasionally murder Serbs at random. In March 2004, for example, thousands of "extremists" burned hundreds of Serb churches, monasteries, houses and schools. So it was a fair cop when Kofi Annan's special envoy reported last year that minorities here faced a "grim" time and that the rule of law was fragile.

A year or two ago this assessment would have barred talks on Kosovo's future status – the formula was "Standards before Status". But no longer. Thankfully it's now "Status before Standards". Better still, the outcome of the negotiations has already been decided. And we Kosovo Albanians are the winners. In February John Sawyers, the political director of your Foreign Office, said that the Contact Group (a club of powerful countries that decide what happens in the Balkanic latitudes) had already decided on an independent Kosovo. Hurrah!

We also now have a strong leader to fight our corner in the talks. Poor old president Ibrahim Rugova died earlier this year. Lots of people voted for him because they liked him, he was decent and not a gangster – rare in Kosovo politics. But at the same time they knew Rugova's earlier passive resistance campaign had failed hopelessly in the face of Serb aggression. By contrast, the new prime minister, Agim Ceku, was the commander of the KLA and has adopted the mantle of national leader that was the president's for so long. He's popular with the Brits and the Americans too. Perhaps they're thinking of Nixon in China or Begin at Camp David: hardliners always have more political capital to spend in making compromises on emotive questions.

But things are going so much our way that there may not be many compromises needed. The biggest would probably be a moratorium on a serious army, some continuing foreign supervision and things like that.

On the other hand events in Serbia are providing many side-splitting laughs in the smoke-filled coffee shops of Pristina. What's going on in Belgrade right now shows us that Serbia is so clapped out you almost feel sorry for it. Serbia's leaders, President Kostunica and Prime Minister Tadic, know they're about to lose Kosovo. So in a masterful display of craven cowardice, both refuse to attend the status talks and are trying to dissociate themselves from power as much as possible.

The problem in Serbia is that the aggressively nationalist Serbian Radical Party has the largest share of the vote; and the late, unlamented Slobbo's Socialists are keeping Kostunica's clapped out coalition in power through informal support. If Kosovo goes, they'll pull the plug, and the smart money would be on the fascists to win a new election. But so what? The Serb army is in rag order and would have trouble breaking up a tea party, let alone taking on NATO and the officially disbanded KLA.

Was any of this what you wanted in 1999? What indeed did you want in 1999? That's another academic question as we're off to buy the bunting for our new country.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"Every country has to find its own way of dealing with these creatures," a spokesman for FrogWatch told reporters in Darwin, "because otherwise we'd be overrun by them. In Peru, they put Titicaca frogs into blenders, and serve them up as a delicious frog-based beverage. In Arizona, people like to catch Colorado toads and lick the milky secretion from their skin, because it has hallucinogenic properties. But here in Australia, we've decided to deal with our plague of cane toads by putting them in a giant juicer, and turning them into liquid fertiliser."

The spokesman was introducing a new brand of fertiliser called Toad Juice, made by FrogWatch in collaboration with a commercial fertiliser company. "Nobody wants to see our streets ruined by thousands of squashed and rotting cane toad carcasses. We're expecting to see hundreds of thousands of them this spring, so we're asking the entire community to help us in this project. We'll be installing collection bins around the city, where people can place live or dead toads. The best thing to do if you catch one in your garden is to wipe haemorrhoid cream on the skin to anaesthetise it, then put it in your freezer to gently kill it. Then next time you go out, just pop the toads in our nearest bin, and we'll juice them up. Toad juice is great on banana and pawpaw plants, and it'll be in the shops soon. Remember, it's organic too." *(The Age [Australia], 26/1/06. Spotter: George Houlder)*

– o –

"I do not believe these rumours about a thieving sexual pervert," Junichiro Nirasawa told reporters at the Bunka Girls High School in Nishitokyo, "because this area is known for its safety. The theft of seventy-seven right-foot slippers from lockers belonging to the schoolgirls could not have been committed by a human, because no man could carry so many, nor were the locker doors broken. That's why I am convinced that this is the work of aliens.

"Recently, there have been lots of reports of UFOs flying in formation over Tokyo. And a man arrested last week for running a harem said that he'd been dealing with insect-shaped aliens, which makes sense. That's why he was so popular with women, he'd been channelling energy from extra-terrestrial beings. Venetians have friendly feelings towards Earthlings, and they like slippers, but somehow I don't think it's them. No, this is the work of Martians. They're notorious for their practical jokes." (Mainichi Daily, 9/2/06. Spotter: Frank Dutton)

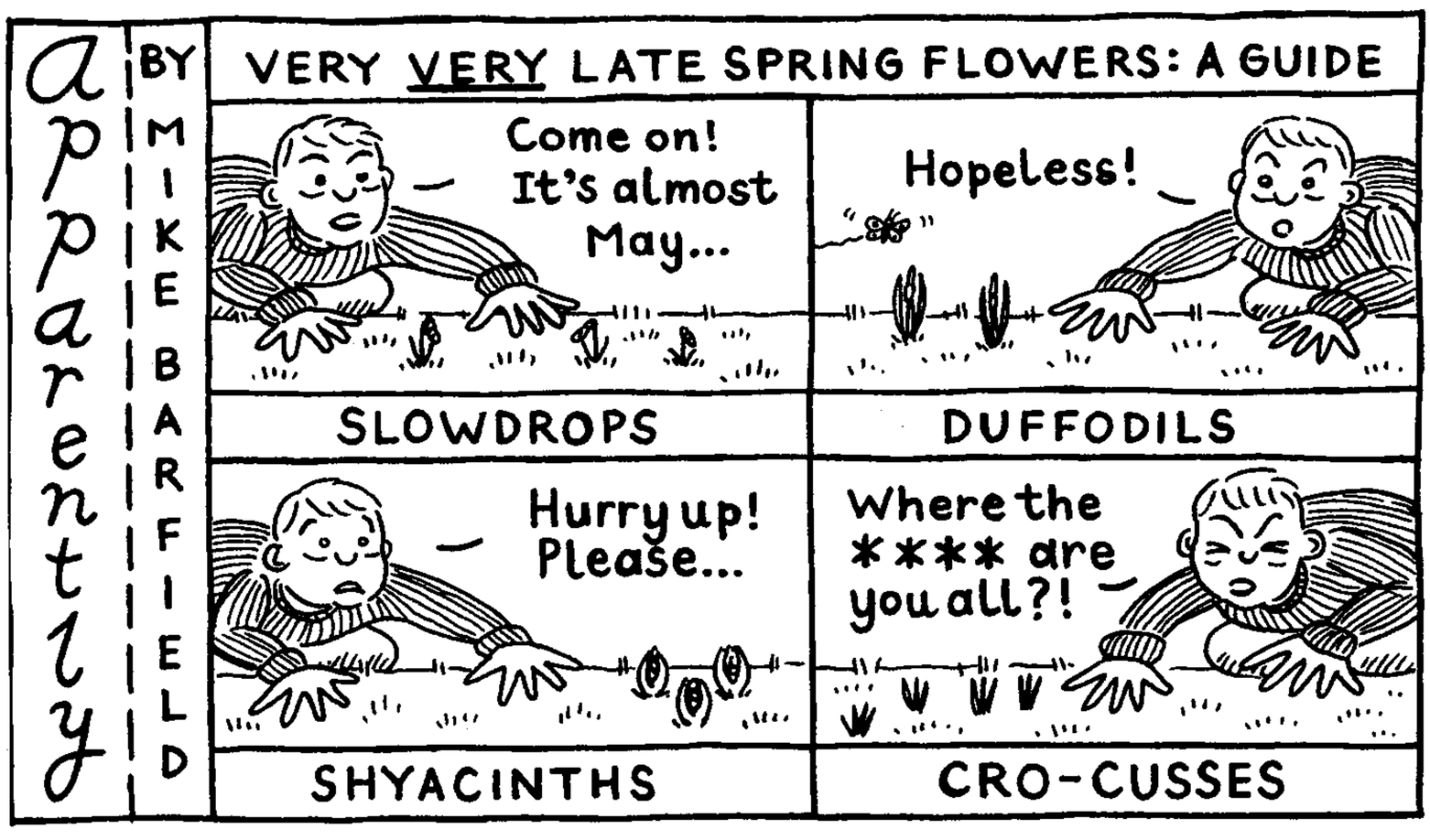
– o –

"It always seemed strange to me that people train every part of their body except their sexual organ," Master Chin-sheng Tu told an audience of martial arts enthusiasts in Taipei. "So about twenty-five years ago, I developed the art of Jiu Yang Shen Gong, and started exercising my penis every day, just like an arm or a leg. Most men think their penis is just for ejaculation and urination, but there is so much more that it can do. With my own penis, for example, I can pull cars, break blocks of ice, open envelopes, pick up litter, and even smash coconuts, all without feeling any pain.

"With just a half-hour of practice each day – which involves massaging, slapping, pulling,

and hitting your flaccid penis with a special tool – I can promise you quick results. After a week, your hips will loosen. In two weeks, you will no longer feel thirsty. After a month, your vision will become clearer. By two months, your complexion will have improved and the bags under your eyes will have disappeared. And after three months, you will require almost no sleep, will seldom need to go to the bathroom, and you will feel powerful all the time. And of course, sex will be great.

"Women can perform Jiu Yang Shen Gong too, by inserting a special ping-pong ball attached to a rod into their vagina, and hanging heavy weights from it, just like the man does with his penis. The modern world is toxic, the environment is filled with pollution, but Shen Gong will enable you to oppose the unnatural poisons that permeate our lands and damage us. Please note that these exercises must not be performed when you are aroused, only at rest. For a full explanation of the techniques, buy my new video, *Iron Crotch*, on sale now at US$11.99." *(Kung Fu magazine, September 2005. Spotter: Azmi Merican)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And let me say at once I'm really sick of being told that I'm 'having a row with Gordon'. As you all know, Gordon and I go back a long way and we've been working together, singing from the same hymn sheet, for many, many, many years – and I'll tell you what, that's the way it is going to stay. Me and Gordon. Gordon and me. Shoulder to shoulder. How did that old hymn have it? "Walking along, singing a song, side by side" *(Hymns Modern and Modern)* So there you have it. No rift. No row. No split. Just a couple of old pals doing what they do best. Getting along. Singing a song. Side by side. Except, of course, with Gordon just a little bit behind!

But, as with all relationships, there are bound to be times when we don't get along quite as well as normal, times when we have a few minor disagreements. That's bound to happen, particularly when one of the partners is a difficult person to like, someone who always wants to call the shots and tends to get in a sulk if he doesn't get his own way. I'm not necessarily saying that Gordon is like that – but of course we all know that he is. As Mr Byers and Mr Milburn have been explaining to as many parishioners as they can find who will listen, which alas is not nearly enough since they both sadly had to resign from the PCC under something of a cloud which was, of course, not in any way of their making... er... where was I?

All of which brings me to my fourth and final point. Despite the fact that I am *not* having a row with Gordon, it has become only too evident that when it comes to the job he is meant to be doing i.e. looking after the parish accounts, he has been found hopelessly inadequate. If I was ***not*** having a row with him I might have had to take him to one side and say something pretty cross to him. Like, "For goodness sake, Gordon, pull your socks up or I'll have to find someone who can add up to do your job!"

And then people would have said, "Look, the vicar and the treasurer are having a row!" Which of course we are not.

Which leads naturally to my fifth point, which is Gordon's ridiculous idea that he might one day succeed me as the vicar. Oh dear! I wonder who put that idea into his head. Just because we had dinner at a restaurant a very, very long time ago that's no excuse for Gordon to get ideas above his station.

And just because I *may* have mentioned a date to him as a time when I *might* think of retiring, it doesn't mean I have any intention of retiring now or at any time in the future!

"I'll be there for you" *(Book of Friends, Ch. 7.13)*, as seen by Mr de la Nougerede

And how could I? Cherie was kind enough to give me a ten-year diary for Christmas and it is already chock-a-block with important engagements for every week right up to Christmas 2016.

And just look at some of the things which I've got to do.

- March 14th 2007: Open the new Tesco in Tesco Road.
- June 10th 2008: Get Mrs Beckett to paint over the graffiti on the Millennium Tent.
- September 28th 2009: Abolish poverty.
- February 11th 2010: Cut waiting lists at St Albion's hospital by closing it down.
- February 9th 2011: Ditto St Albion's Kwik-Fit Beacon Technology Primary School.
- January 7th 2012: Appear on St Albion's Community hospital radio to choose my favourite records.
- July 20th 2012: Attend opening ceremony of the Reverend Tony Blair memorial games in the Tesco carpark.

And that's only a few of the millions of important things that I've agreed to do in the next 10 years!

And you'll note it wasn't Gordon they asked to these events but yours truly. After all, who would want to hear some grumpy old Scotsman on the radio playing his favourite bagpipe tunes when they could be listening to Mick Jagger.

But hey, don't any of you go away with the idea that Gordon and I are not really great mates! We go back a long way, we've been working together for many, many years etc, etc. And here's the proof – how can two people have a row when they are not even talking to each other? Think about it!

Yours,

Tony

St Albion's Welcomes Sister Condi

Mr Straw writes: I can't tell you how excited I was when my special friend, the beautiful Sister Condi of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons graciously agreed to pay a three-day visit to St Albion's, just to see me! And I was allowed to be her personal escort the whole time she was here! I thought very carefully about what such a beautiful and distinguished nun might want to see, and long before she'd arrived I'd got our itinerary all sorted out (not to mention my new contact lenses, to make me look younger and more handsome!).

We began when I met her at the bus station and she stepped out of her coach and I told her that she looked like a million dollars in her beautifully cut Moron suit and high heels! I thought to myself, "What a shame that this vision of loveliness should have dedicated her life to the service of the Rev. Dubya, when she might have made some lucky man a perfect partner!" Our three days went by like I was in a dream. Did we really have that unforgettable dance together in the St Albion's Youth Club, to the sound of the Beatles singing 'She Loves Me, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah'? And did we really have a candlelit pint of beer in the Frog and Firkin as the Karaoke machine played 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand'! She flashed me one of her lovely smiles and said it was one of the most romantic places she'd ever been to! And did we really pay a visit together to our local mosque? No we didn't, because there was a huge crowd standing in the street outside telling her to go home! JS.

LOCAL MEDIA ALERT

Since the vicar, Mr Brown, Mr Prescott and the rest of the PCC are at present very busy with pressing parish affairs, the vicar wants it be known that Mrs Beckett will be answering all your enquiries about everything until further notice: e.g. the row Gordon and I are not having, why Mr Sainsbury was quite right not to tell anyone that he 'lent' the Parish £2 million in exchange for being given a seat on the PCC; and why she is the only person the vicar can trust not to say something stupid! T.B.

Announcements

Well done, Gordon, for your mission this week to go and be photographed with Saint Nelson of Mandela. I hate to quibble with such a noble and generous gesture (with the parish's money, mind you!), but, hey, haven't we seen this idea somewhere before? Let me give you a clue: The tea-drinking idea? The having-a-baby idea? Does this ring a bell?

No offence, Gordon, but isn't it time that you started thinking up some ideas for yourself instead of copying everything I do! T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

How often do we have to hear these pathetic stories about the vicar and Mr Brown not getting on? I know Tony and Gordon better than anyone else in the world and, take it from me, they are the best friends that anyone could ever be. *Is this the sort of thing you wanted me to say, Tony? It should annoy Gordon anyway!*

Yours faithfully,
P. Mandelson,
Rue des Matelots,
Avenue de la Constitution, Bruxelles.

PS. Je sais où vouz habitez!

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mr Mills, rather better known to most of us as Mrs Jowell's husband. Let us pray that, having sneaked back into the parish hoping that nobody would notice, Mr Mills may be given the wisdom to return to Italy again as soon as possible, and meanwhile to keep his big mouth shut! May he come to learn that it doesn't help anyone for him to go round telling everyone that he only left Tessa to "take the heat off her" and that it would not be long now before they were back together again! May he remember that if he happens to be wondering what to do with the odd £350,000 'present' that he might have been given by my friend Silvio, then we are rather short of money ourselves at the moment and we could use it to repay a few of our 'fairweather friends' who've now suddenly decided that they want their money back. TB

News in Brief

PEACE PROCESS SHOCK

EFFORTS to revive the peace process in Northern Ireland received a boost last night when the IRA confirmed that it had decommissioned another ten bullets.

"They have been placed well out of reach into Denis Donaldson's torso, chest and legs," said a senior *(cont. p. 94)*

BECKHAM LATEST

DAVID BECKHAM has revealed that he suffers from a debilitating condition, OPD (Obsessive Publicity Disorder).

"Being an OPD sufferer means that unless there's a story in the paper about me where I can shamelessly name-check products which I'm paid millions to promote, like Coca-Cola, I have to spend the rest of the day re-arranging my publicists," said David *(cont. p. 94)*

ROWLING ATTACKS 'THIN BOOKS'

by Our Literary correspondent **Malcolm Mugglewich**

HARRY POTTER author JK Rowling has hit out at an alarming trend in many UK bookshops for 'disturbingly thin books'.

"Some of these so-called books have as little as two or three hundred pages and could easily be read in as little as one day" a disgusted JK Rowling told reporters.

"People should read books that are at least seven hundred and fifty pages long and are so heavy you need three adults just to pick them up".

"Selfish cow"

SOMETHING SCIENTISTS TOLD YOU WAS BAD FOR YOU, IS IN FACT GOOD FOR YOU

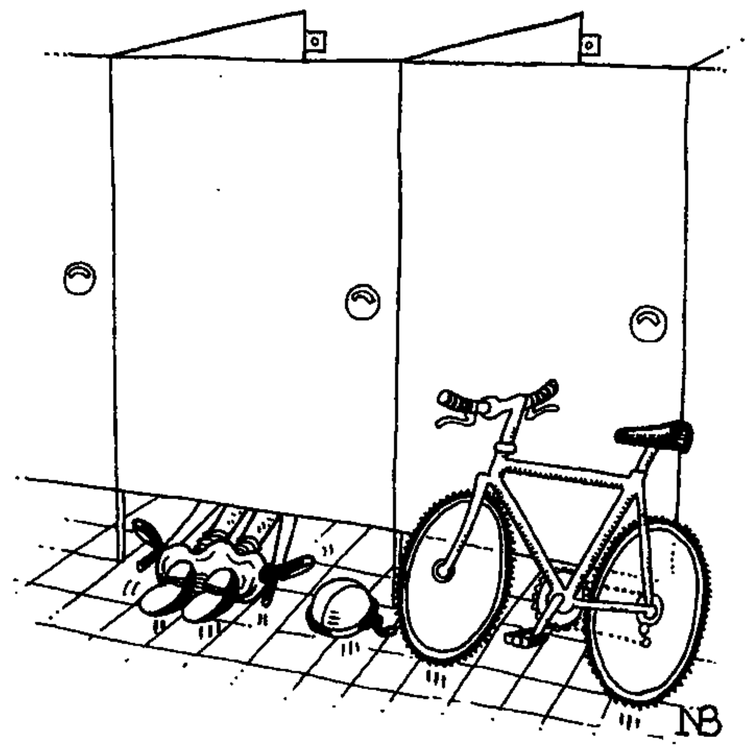
SCIENTISTS have today revealed that something that was previously thought to be bad for you is, in fact, good for you.

On Other Pages

● Something that was thought to be good for you is, in fact, bad for you.

● Something that was thought to be bad for you that was revealed to be good for you is actually revealed to be bad for you.

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



Oh dear, what can the matter be?
Boris got caught with Anna Fazackerley.
They were at it from Monday to Saturday.
His wife didn't know he was there.
(Traditional)

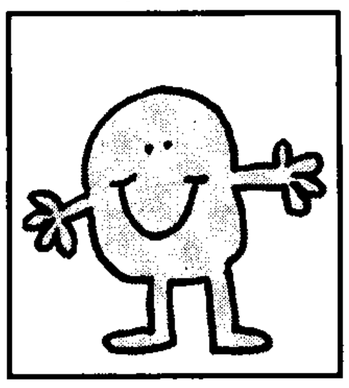
Publishing Sensation as New Mr Men Launched

by our Literary Staff ***Phil Boots***

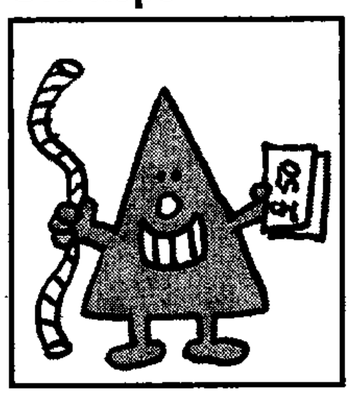
THE WORLD of children's books was rocked to its foundations by the announcement that a new series of Mr Men charcters had been created to join the old family favourites such as **Mr Happy**, **Mr Nosey** and **Little Miss Naughty**.

The new characters, unveiled to gasps of admiration from the world's media, include:

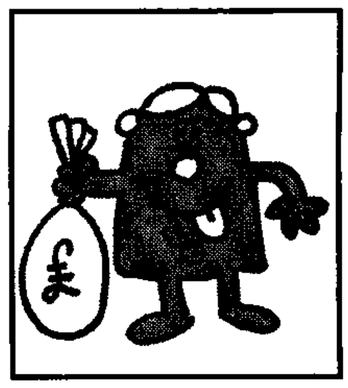
Mr Easy-to-Draw



Mr Money-for-Old-Rope



Little Miss No-Opportunity-to-Cash-In



(That's enough new characters, Ed.)

Said publisher **Mr Greedy,** "This new series is sure to bring a smile to our little accountant's face."

FORBIDDEN IMAGE 'DEEPLY OFFENSIVE TO BELIEVERS'

by Our Religious Staff **Dan Ishcartoon**

THERE were violent protests last night over the suggestion that an image of Mazher Mahmood, the beloved journalist, was going to appear in a British newspaper.

Mahmood, who is worshipped by millions of "haqs" all over the world, is traditionally *never* depicted in print and to do so is seen as a crime worthy of death.

Huge Profit

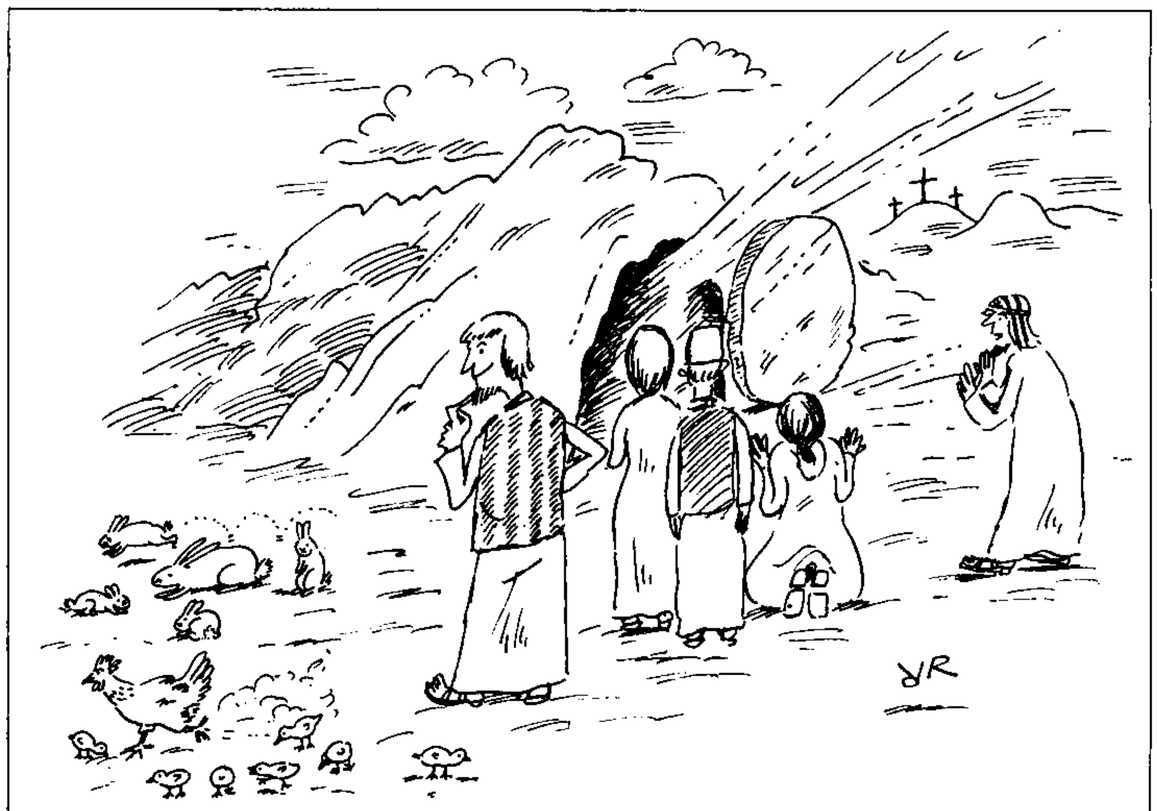
Although Mahmood has occasionally been pictured wearing Arab robes and sunglasses – usually standing on the deck of a yacht or in a five-star hotel suite – his actual face is always obscured out of respect.

But now fanatical *News of the World* lawyers have taken to the streets carrying banners which read "Praise Be To Mahmood!", "Death To Galloway!" and "Behead The Enemies Of Murdoch!"

Fatwad of Cash

Advocates of free speech were, however, incensed by what they saw as "censorship". Said Professor Greenslade, Reader in Media Studies at the Rusbridger University (formerly Toynbee Poly): "This is just special pleading on behalf of a minority group. We have the right to see what Mahmood looks like."

He continued: "We're not suggesting that he is a sleazy agent provocateur who stitches people up in order to sell newspapers – although he is."



Great moments in commercialism...

Writing exclusively for the Eye

NORTON MYDAY MP

He's the has-been that everyone ignores.

TONY BLAIR is doing irreversible damage to the public's perception of politicians as he clings on to office and refuses to leave the political stage gracefully.

This of course contrasts greatly to the dignified manner in which I bowed out of politics.

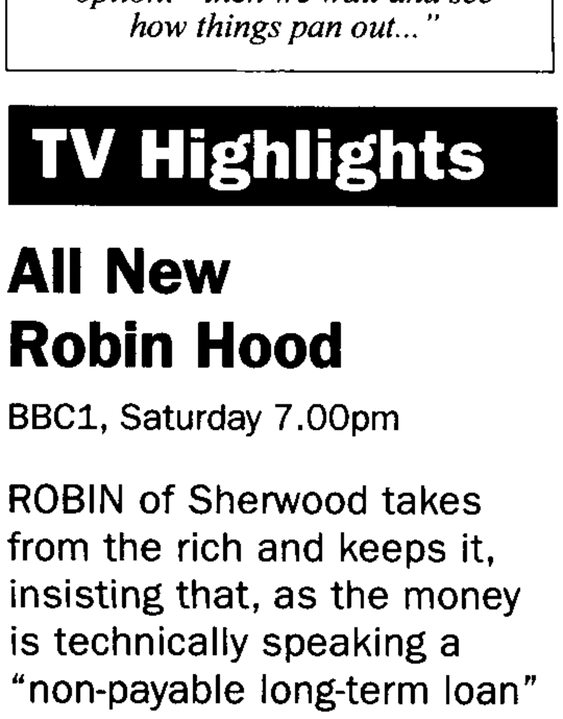
A mere six months to the day after I was pictured snorting cocaine with a couple of prostitutes and an international arms dealer in a hotel suite in Mombassa... I left my department for the last time with my head held high.

That six months, of course was spent rightfully denying I was ever at that hotel, then rightfully stating I was at the hotel, but denying that the incident ever took place, then rightfully admitting the incident had taken place in a tasteful statement given by my wife in which she gave me her blessing to sleep with 'good-time' girls.

Then and only then, when it became clear that the arms-dealer had sold nerve gas to Iraq, did I stage a measured and dignified photo-opportunity outside my house, where my two older boys took a dose of nerve gas to prove that it really didn't do any harm.

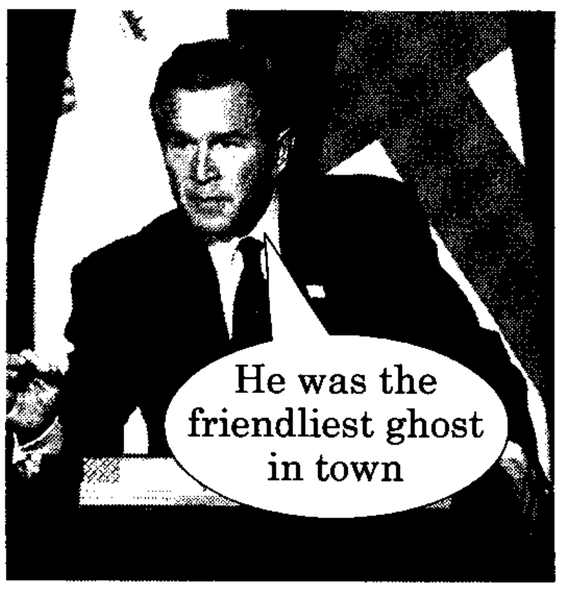
Shortly after their funerals and ongoing furore in the press, I reluctantly submitted my resignation to the P.M.

Why can't today's politicians display any of the dignity I showed when leaving office?



"Okay - it's agreed; we announce - "to do nothing is not an option!" then we wait and see how things pan out..."

BUSH TRIBUTE TO CASPER WEINBERGER



TV

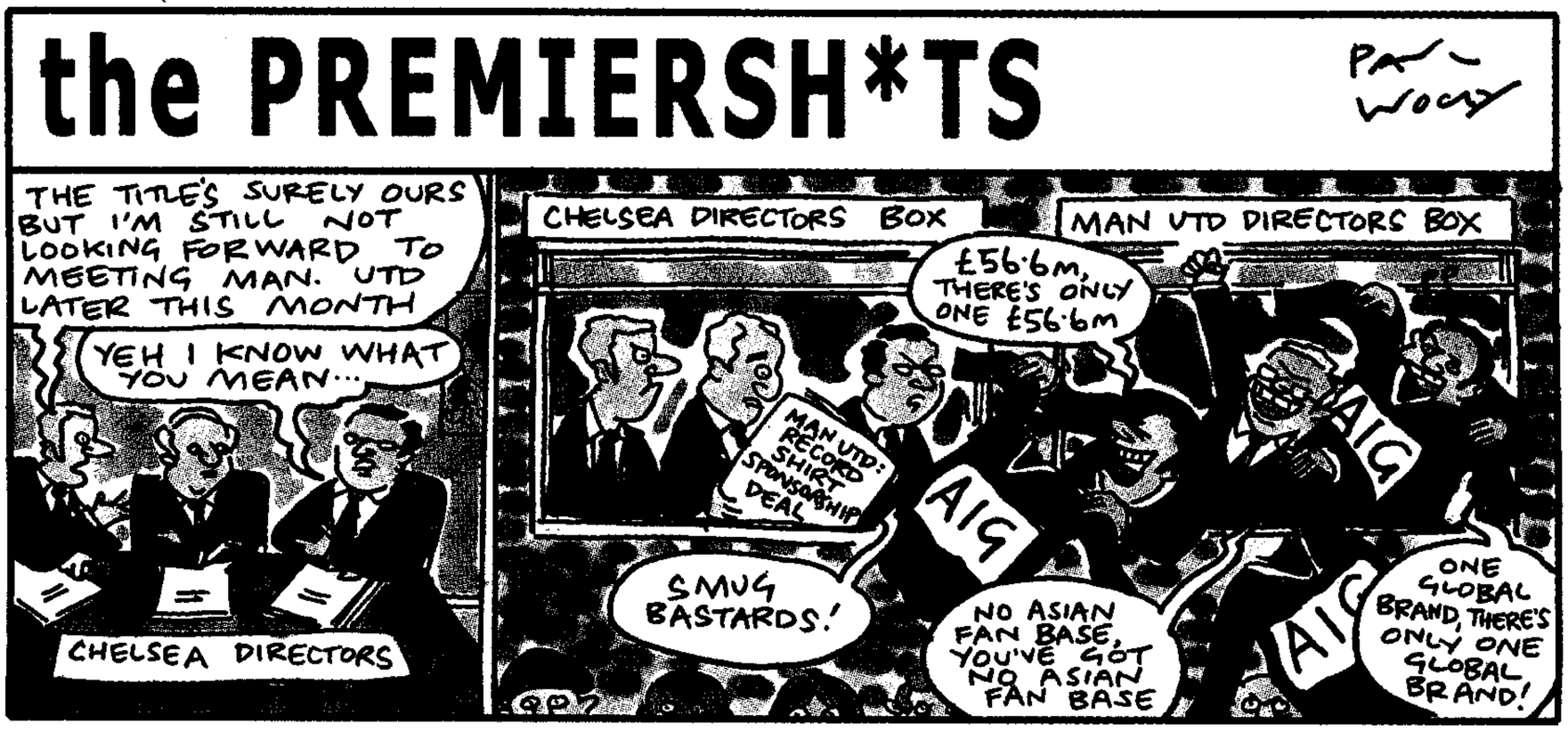
Foolproof Tom Parker Bowles Recipe For Getting Your Own Cookery Show On BBC2

1. Be the son of Camilla Parker Bowles.

2. Er...

3. That's it.

the PREMIERSH*TS


THE TITLE'S SURELY OURS BUT I'M STILL NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING MAN. UTD LATER THIS MONTH
YEH I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN...
CHELSEA DIRECTORS
CHELSEA DIRECTORS BOX
MAN UTD DIRECTORS BOX
£56·6M, THERE'S ONLY ONE £56·6M
MAN UTD: RECORD SHIRT SPONSORSHIP DEAL
AIG
SMUG BASTARDS!
NO ASIAN FAN BASE, YOU'VE GOT NO ASIAN FAN BASE
ONE GLOBAL BRAND, THERE'S ONLY ONE GLOBAL BRAND!

TV Highlights

All New Robin Hood

BBC1, Saturday 7.00pm

ROBIN of Sherwood takes from the rich and keeps it, insisting that, as the money is technically speaking a "non-payable long-term loan" and not a donation to his cause, he is under no obligation to pass the money on to the poor.

'NO CIVIL WAR' Straw's Shock Claim

by Our Man Not In Baghdad

IRAQI leaders were stunned last night at UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw's claim that there was "no civil war in the Labour Party".

"How can he say this," asked one, "when we see daily news footage of running battles between the two factions? The Brunnis and the Blairites are obviously attacking each other indiscriminately."

However, Mr Straw insisted that hostilities were limited to a tiny area of Downing Street and that the vast majority of the Labour Party was peaceful.

"Democracy is coming back to the Labour Party slowly," he claimed, after visiting the war zone for five minutes. "I have spoken to at least one taxi driver who works in Downing Street and he is optimistic about the future."

On Other Pages

Brown bombshell **2**
Milburn suicide **3**
Labour Party burns **4**

NUTTER GETS INTO WHITEHOUSE

EYE EXCLUSIVE

A dangerous lunatic today managed to break through the tight security at the White House and become President of the United States of America. The lunatic threatened to invade Iran with nuclear weapons "wherever it may be"

● **Full story p. 94**

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S LAP-TOP DANCER!!?!!

■ **HATS** and everything else off to Bonny Prince Harry, who's not frightened to go with his army buddies for a naughty night out a-leerin' and a-peerin' at leggy lap-dancers in Heathrow's fashionable Spearmint Rhino!?! What hot-blooded male wouldn't do the same to let off a bit of steam after a hard day's grillin' and a-drillin' on the Sandhurst Parade Ground!?!! God bless you, Sire!!!?! What girl wouldn't be honoured to help you stand to attention!!?! Geddit!!?! I bet you did!!? Geddit?!?

■ PRINCE HARRY?!? What a disgrace!?! An officer of Her Majesty's Armed Forces reduced to seeing a sordid sex-show in seedy Slough!?! What are we supposed to think when the grandson of the Queen of England is seen a-droolin' and a-dribblin' at the antics of some sleazy slapper stickin' her wotsit up against a greased pole??!? Get back to barracks, Your Royal Randyness and have a cold shower!!?!

■ *DID YOU shed a tear when you read that Britain's Peter Pan of Pop, Sir Cliff Richard, is going to sell up and leave our shores for good?!?!?? All together now – "We're all going on a summer holiday. No more taxes for a year or two ..." Good riddance, say I, if that's all you think of us!?!?!*

■ HERE THEY are – Glenda's Easter Bunnies!?!!

● **Judas!?!!** OK, so he's been given a bad press for 2000 years but he can come and kiss me any day!?!!

● **Dan Brown?!??** Here's the Glenda Code for you to crack – N-O-R-W-I-C-H!?!! Geddit?!!

● **Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh!?!??** OK, you lost your Da Vinci Code plagiarism case, but don't worry – I'll handle your briefs in future!?!

● **Matthew D'Ancona** – crazy name, boring guy!?!!?

Byeeee!!!

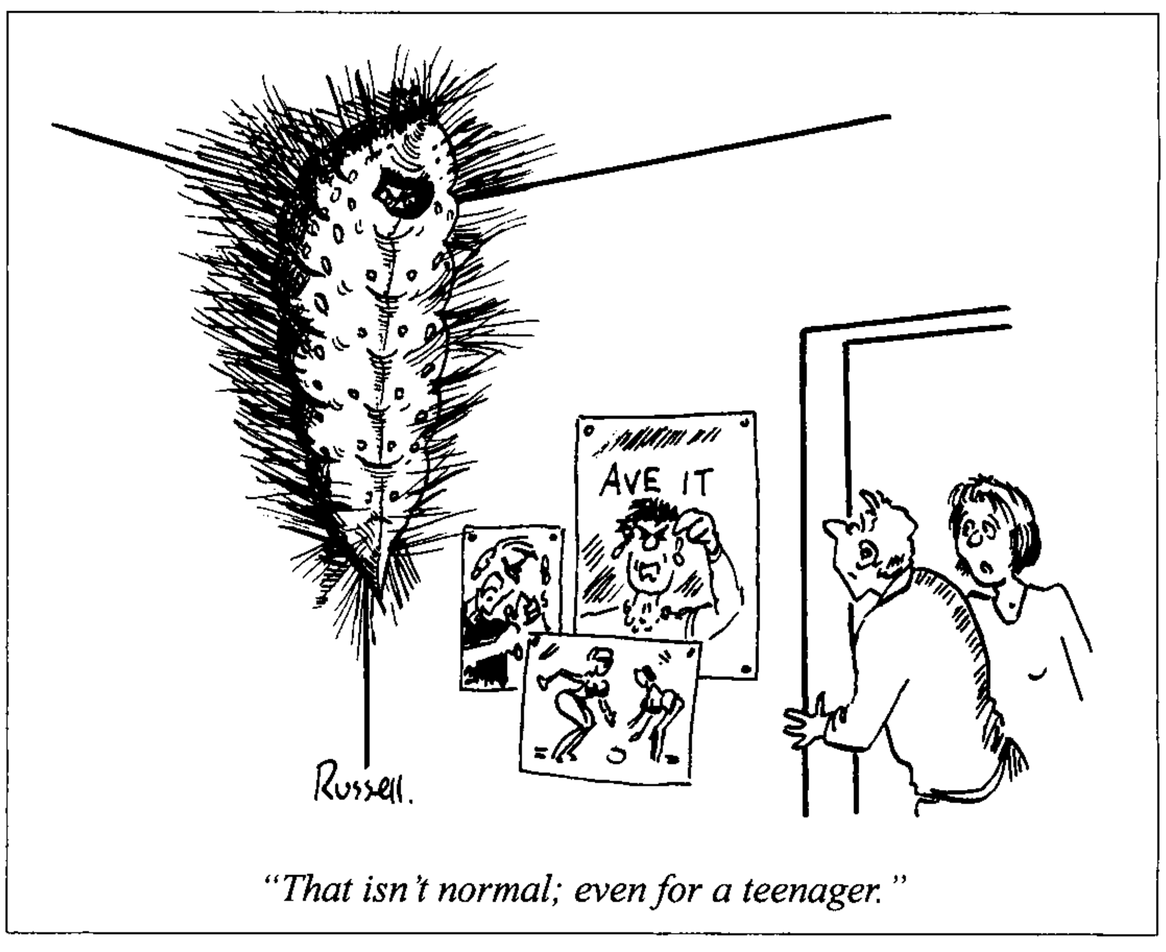
THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL An Apology

IN RECENT YEARS, in common with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression that Camilla Parker-Bowles, now the Duchess of Cornwall, was a frumpy, ill-dressed, socially awkward divorcée, who was totally unsuited in every way for her future role as Queen of England. Headlines such as "Blimey, What An Old Bag?", "Hey, look What The Cat's Dragged In" or "On Yer Bike, Granny, You've Got A Face Like A Horse And We Hate You" may have reinforced the view that we in some way wished to disparage Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Cornwall, and to compare her unfavourably with her predecessor, Diana, the Princess of Wales.

We now accept that, following her triumphant tour of the Middle East, there was not a jot or scintilla of truth in any of the above opprobrious nonsense, based as it was on no more than malicious and unsubstantiated tittle-tattle, and that, contrary to our previous allegations, Camilla is in fact the most beautiful, fashionable, stylish, witty, warm-hearted paragon of all the feminine virtues that the world has ever had the good fortune to see. She is furthermore uniquely well-equipped in every way to support the Prince in his role both as heir to the throne and future King. She is indeed the 'Queen of all our Hearts', unlike that neurotic, bulimic, stick-thin basket-case Diana who we always hated. The Eye says 'God bless you Ma'am, May you reign over us for a Cam-million years!"

NEW CAMILLA PICTURE

THE Duchess of Cornwall as you've never seen her before – as captured by top glamour photographer Mario Testosteroni. Unveiling the picture yesterday, he said, "I tried to portray her as she really isn't."



"That isn't normal; even for a teenager."

CAMERON LAUNCHES SHOCK ATTACK ON UKIP

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

MR DAVID 'Dave' Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party, last night launched an astonishing attack on the UK Independence Party, describing them as "fruitcakes, looneys and Closet Tories."

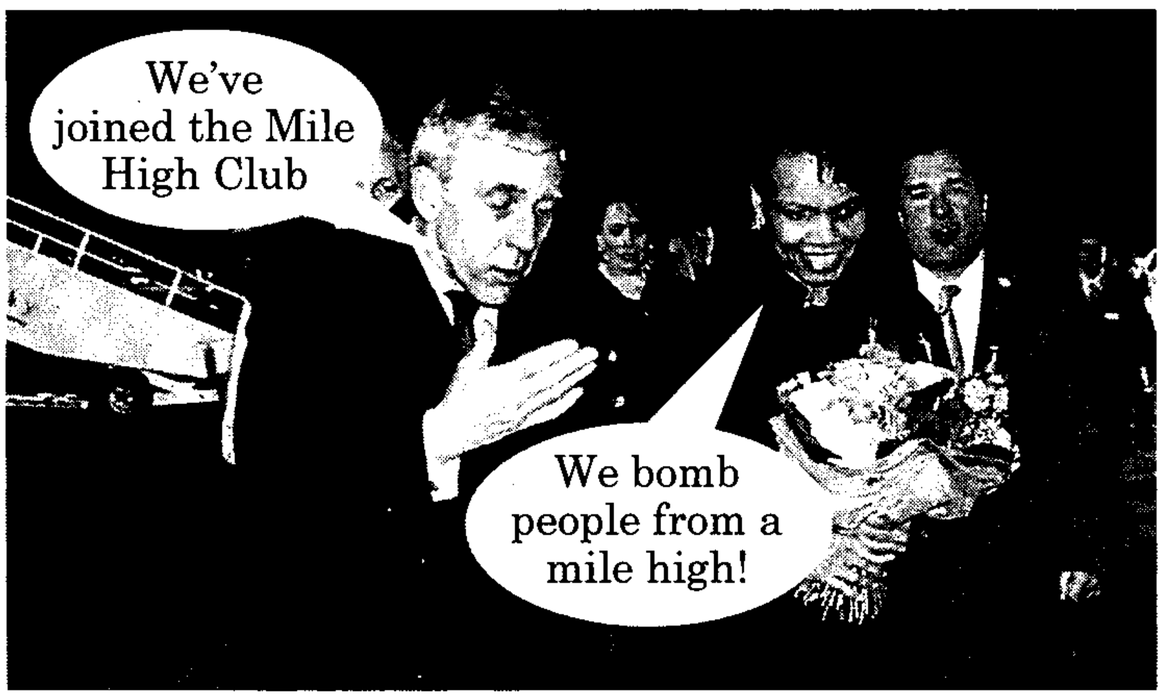
Mr Cameron told listeners to "Hullo Cabbies", Radio Five Live's new exciting talk show for taxi drivers, that UKIP members were "basically and whatever they say, just a bunch of Tories, with all those unpleasant Tory views that we don't want in my party."

Boris to keep his job

"No", Mr Cameron continued, "those kind of antediluvian attitudes are completely out of place in the fast-changing 21st century, when what people are looking for is a modern, compassionate, caring party which believes in an end to yah-boo, Punch and Judy politics – unlike those sad tossers in UKIP. I hate them."

For a fuller version of this story, download Peter O'Bore podcast on www.borepod.com

JACK AND CONDI FLY IN



BECKETT 100th ANNIVERSARY

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Margaret Beckett, widely considered to be the world's greatest minister for the environment, agriculture and fisheries.

To mark the occasion, Private Eye is staging performances of all Mrs Beckett's best-loved speeches, including:

- **Waiting For The Single Farm Payment**
- **Krapp's Red Tape**
- **End-of-Agriculture Game**
- **Unhappy Days**

(That's enough Beckett Plays – Ed)

Exclusive To All Newspapers

YES! IT'S BROWN v. BLAIR

By Our Entire Staff PHIL PAGES

IN an extraordinary development in British politics, it was revealed last night that the tensions between Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Gordon Brown that have been simmering for the last 8 years are still simmering.

Remember, you read it here first. Nothing has changed at all. The news is exactly the same as it was in 1997. What was once a raging battleground over personal power has become a raging battleground over personal power. Er... OK we all know this stuff... I don't want to write it... it's a slow news week... it's the school hols for god's sake... I've got to get home... will this do?

© All Newspapers

On other pages

Pope not Protestant **2**
Bears haven't developed alternative toilet arrangements **3**

PRICE 1 PIG

PAGAN TIMES

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR 2001 B.C.

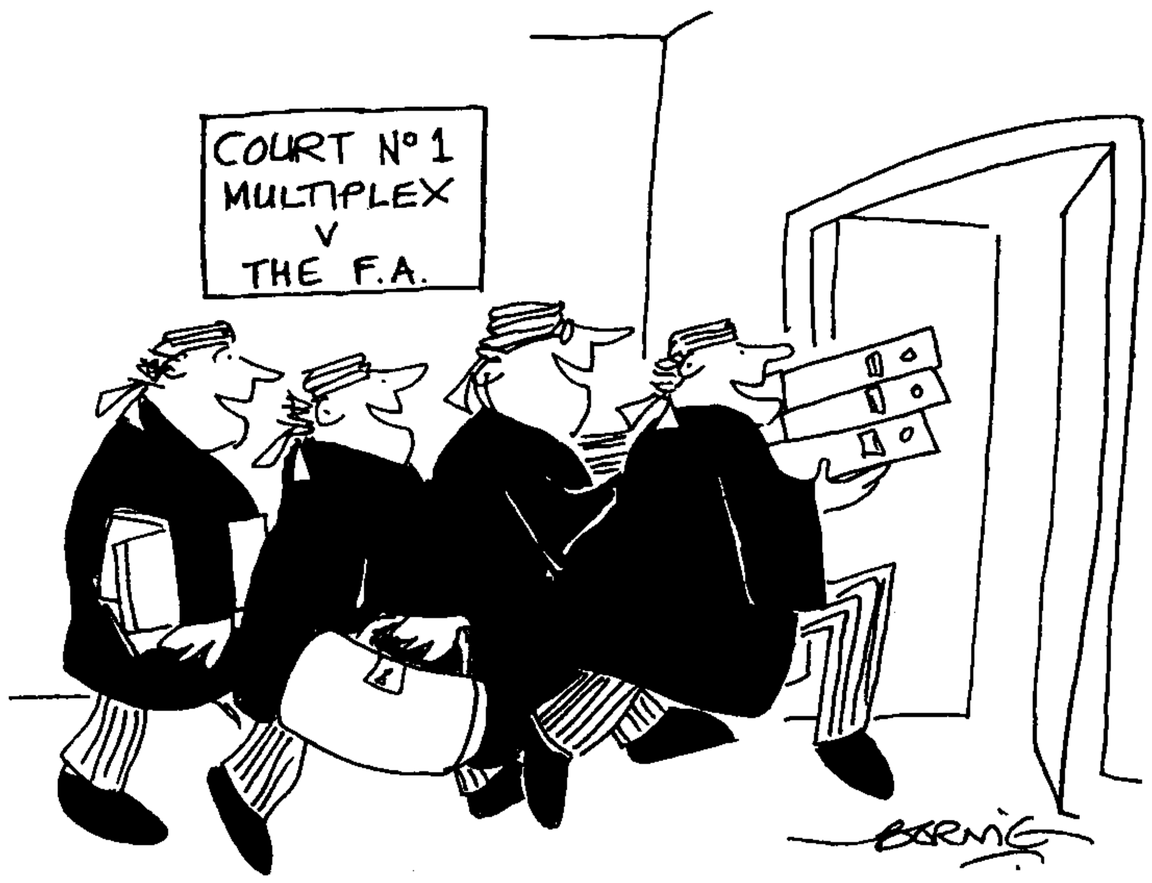
STADIUM DELAYED AGAIN

BY OUR ARCHITECTURAL STAFF W.F. DRUID

THE AMBITIOUS National Stonehenge Stadium being constructed on Salisbury Plain was facing fresh controversy last night when the builders admitted it would not be ready in time for the 2000 B.C. Solstice.

Multi-hex

"I know that was the whole point of it," said a spokesman for the builders, "but we faced unforeseen problems, such as how on earth do you move huge bluestones from the Prescelly Mountains in Wales over 240 miles to the middle of Wiltshire? It's a nightmare." He continued, "OK, with hindsight, maybe we should have thought of that before we put our very cheap bid in, but let me assure you that Stonehenge will be up and running as a fully functional State of the Art Stadium facility by next year and it will give Ancient Britons something to be proud of." He added, "It certainly won't remain an unfinished pile of old stones for the next 4,000 years."



" 'Ere we go! 'Ere we go! 'Ere we go!"

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

Office hours: 9-12 Mon-Tues (except Tuesday)

10 April 2006

0900 hrs All officers to attend an equality-monitoring exercise, conducted by A.C.D.C. Grayling. Officers are invited to declare to each other in confidence their sexual orientation, in order to ascertain whether the station is meeting the required quota of 50 per cent of officers representing the gay, lesbian and trans-gender communities.

1030 hrs The exercise reveals that Neasden has a shortfall in the following areas:
Male gays: 16 officers.
Female gays (lesbian): 13 officers.
Bisexual: 0, thanks to the recent secondment of PC Bothways from Hillingdon.
Trans-gender officers: 200, despite the recruitment of PC/WPC Jackie Castrati.

It was resolved that the station should immediately launch a national advertising campaign, with an estimated budget of £250,000, through such publications as The Guardian and The Guardian, to remedy the shortfall. To achieve the necessary economies to pay for this campaign, it was agreed that operation of the '999' emergency service should be reduced to one hour a fortnight (2-3pm alternate Tuesdays).

1100 hrs Officers called to scene of alleged armed robbery at the HSBC branch in Dinsdale Road. Officers apprehended two suspects carrying shotguns and bags containing £100,000 in cash. In accordance with the new Crime Reduction guidelines, the two armed criminals were given a caution before they were allowed to proceed on their way to the airport. Due to this delay, PCs Clapham and Stockwell assisted them on their outward journey to Colombia by driving them to Heathrow Terminal Five.

1130 hrs An armed response team was sent to Dinsdale Road to arrest the assistant manager of the HSBC, Mr Vijay Sunblest, who had earlier reported an alleged armed robbery at his bank premises. After a short gun battle in which Mr Sunblest was unfortunately fatally wounded, he was posthumously arrested and charged with the offence of wasting police time.

1200 hrs 12-man S.W.A.T. Team dispatched to Herbert Morrison Comprehensive Nursery School following report of racism in playground. Officers arrest 6-year-old (name withheld for legal reasons – Wayne Nuggets, Flat 14b Etherington Estate, Neasden) for claiming franco-ethnic footballing role model Didier Drogba was "a cheat". Child was slightly seriously injured when hurling himself against officer's truncheon during struggle resisting arrest but later successfully charged with racist hate crime under Terrorism Act 2006. Officers Hainault and Uxbridge commended for bravery award.

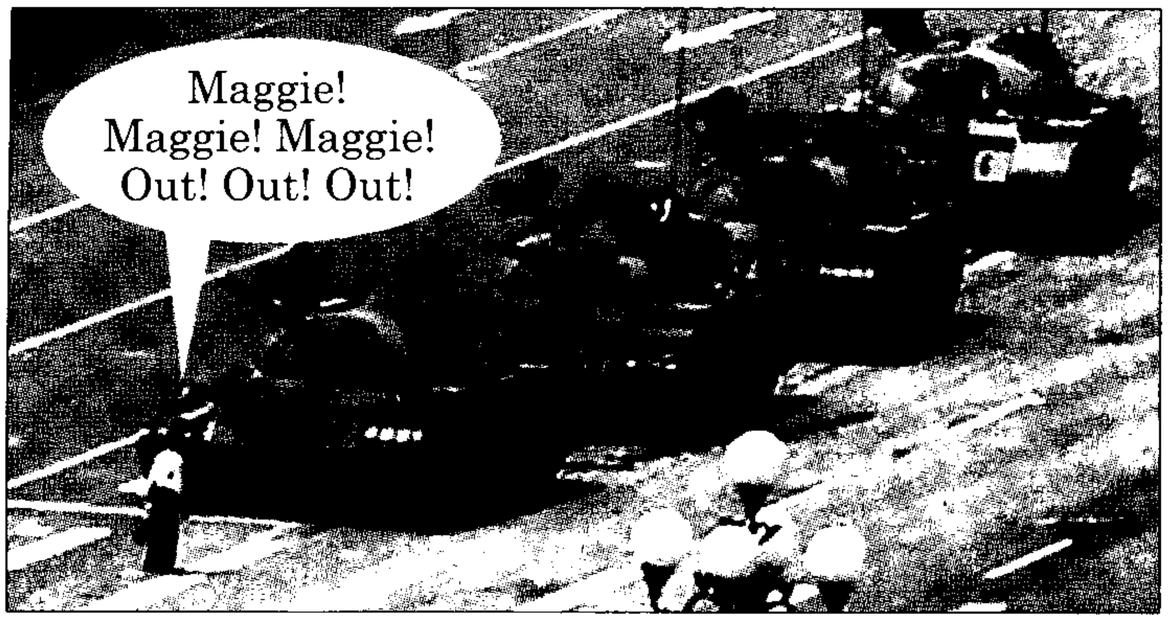
1300 hrs Lunch break. Mrs O'Done, a senior catering assistant in the station canteen, was observed to have committed another racist hate crime by offering as the "daily special" Welsh Rarebit, in contravention of the 1986 Public Order Act, as amended in 2001 and 2003. After a brief interview with 20 officers in the holding cells, Mrs O'Done confessed to "deliberately holding up the Celtic ethnic minority to obloquy and contempt, thus inciting my customers to acts inimical to racial harmony". Mrs O'Done was later admitted to Neasden General Hospital, suffering from a self-inflicted fracture of the spine.

1500 hrs Acting on a tip-off from Community Support Officer Deirdre Dripstone, officers in squad cars were called to the Easybuy Arcade where a suspected terrorist had been seen acting suspiciously. After a high-speed chase, which resulted in only three civilian casualties, officers apprehended Mrs June Taplow, 72, under the Terrorism, Religious and Animal Rights Extremists Act 2006, for being in possession of a suspicious metal tin, carrying the label "Save The Squirrel". After a controlled explosion of the tin, Mrs Taplow was charged and remanded in Belmarsh as a "Class A" prisoner.

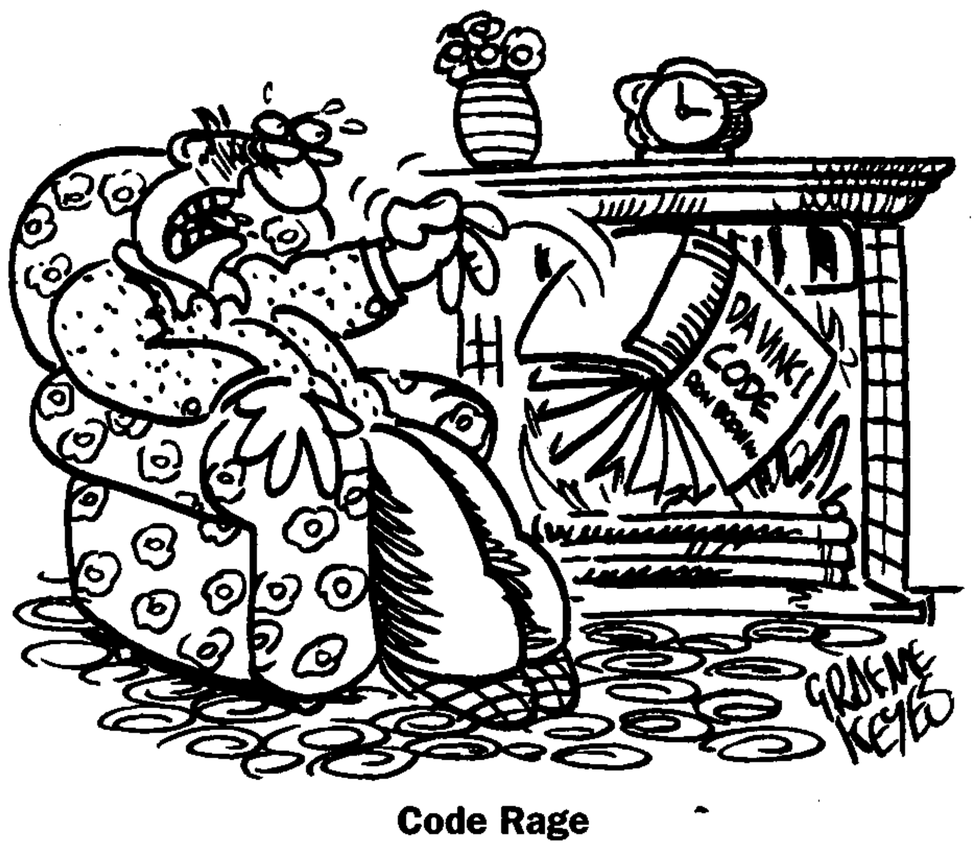
1930 hrs Officers adjourn to the Star of Basra Tandoori and Balti House to celebrate the successful conclusion of the latest Damilola Taylor trial, in which several members of the station force had participated as witnesses and forensic experts, displaying "exemplary standards of competence and dedication".

Red Ken's Guide To History

Part 94: Tiananmen Square



"So who's for a game of 'dare'?"



Code Rage

RESULTS

RACING: AINTREE
The Rooney Stakes (4.00pm)

1 **IDIOT BOY** (evens fav)
2 **Money To Burn** (4-1)
3 **Scouse Git** (11-2)
4 **Fergie's Fool** (10-1)
5 **Bookies' Delight** (20-1)
6 **Spudfacedloser** (33-1)
(That's enough bets. Ed)

POLICE have promised to punish the Fulham fans who mooned at Chelsea supporters two weeks ago. Officers want to get to the bottom of the incidents at Craven Cottage after Fulham's first win over Chelsea in 27 years.

Daily Mail

UKIP FURY

THE GREAT STONES OF CHINA

by Our Chinese Staff **Lynchtime O'Students**

THE world's greatest rock-and-roll rebels today made it clear why they are the greatest rock-and-roll rebels in the history of rock and roll rebellion.

Gang of 4 old men

In a typical act of anti-authoritarian defiance, the lead singer of the Rolling Stones, Sir Michael Jaggersworth, KCVO, 75, told the Chinese authorities: "Yes, sir, we'll do whatever you say. We just want to make money."

Those Censored Stones Songs In Full

● I can't get enough money ● Jumping Jack Cash ● Let's spend the knighthood together ● Little red book

(That's enough rotten old Stones songs. Ed.)

ADVERTISEMENT

SPIES WANTED!

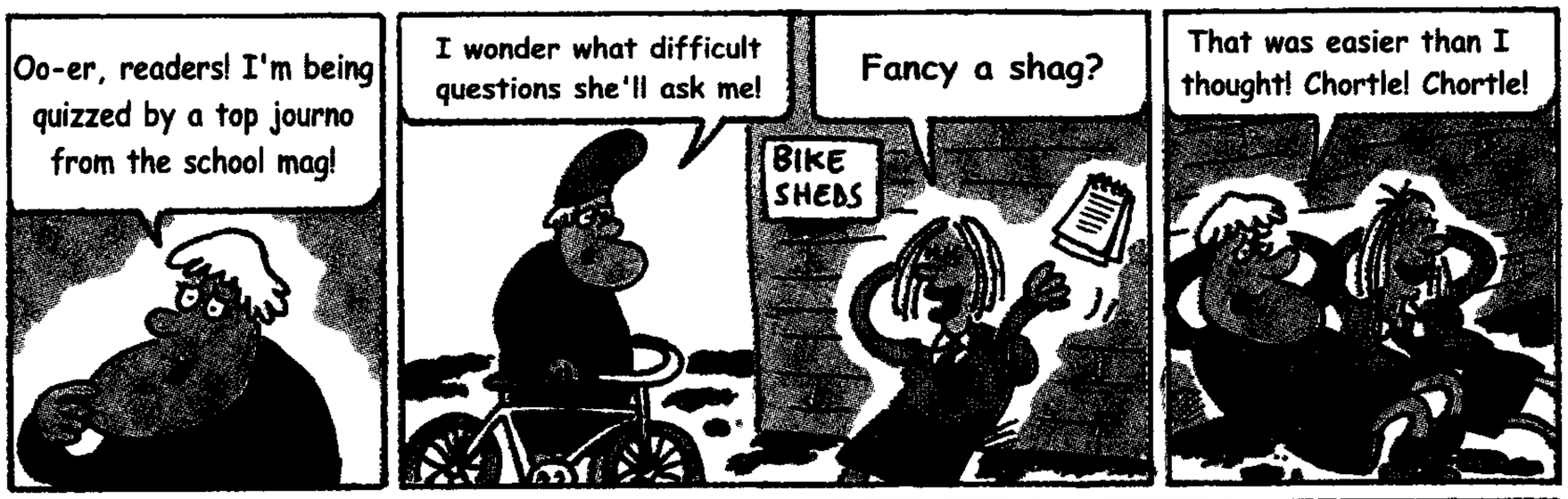
HM GOVERNMENT is looking for highly-qualified and well-placed informers to assist with intelligence gathering among members of the Irish Republican Community.

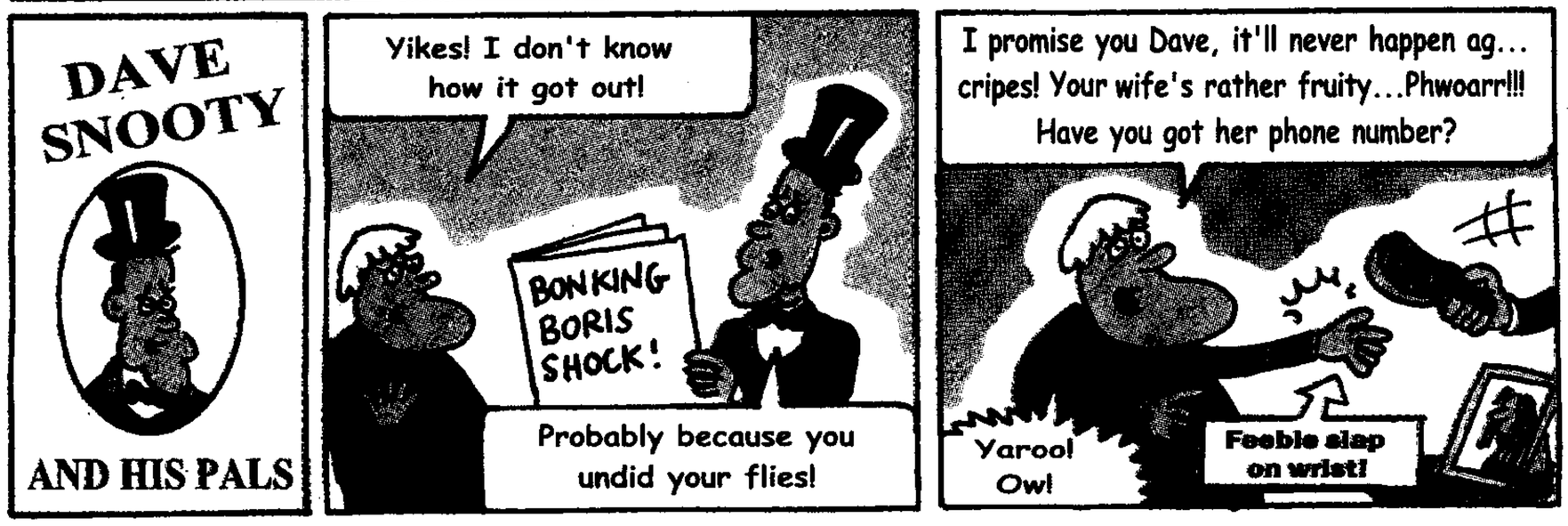
First-class rates of pay, excellent working conditions and lifetime security guaranteed (until they shoot you).

Apply now in total confidence to MI5, Sir Anthony Blunt House, somewhere in London, MI5 SHH and your details will be forwarded to the Sunday World, Belfast, for onward transmission to Mr Martin McGuinness, chairman of the All-Ireland Veterans and Social Welfare Humanitarian Group (formerly the IRA).

THE HASBEANO

FEATURING BORIS THE MENACE
Introducing Anna the Minx!


Oo-er, readers! I'm being quizzed by a top journo from the school mag!
I wonder what difficult questions she'll ask me!
Fancy a shag?
BIKE SHEDS
That was easier than I thought! Chortle! Chortle!


DAVE SNOOTY
AND HIS PALS
Yikes! I don't know how it got out!
BONKING BORIS SHOCK!
Probably because you undid your flies!
I promise you Dave, it'll never happen ag... cripes! Your wife's rather fruity...Phwoarr!!! Have you got her phone number?
Yaroo! Ow!
Feeble slap on wrist!

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Mr Gene Pitney, Dixons the High Street electrical retailer, and 'Davina', the BBC1 mid-week chat show hosted by Ms Davina McCall.

So. Farewell then
Gene Pitney, Dixons and
Davina.

You will all be
Missed.

Except for
Davina.

E. J. Thribb
(17½ Hours From Tulsa)

DIARY

NOEL EDMONDS

The tried-and-trusted Edmonds brand has reignited itself, like a veritable beacon of hope, illuminating fresh paths for the broadcasting industry. Yes, folks, Edmonds is back, and bigger and better than ever, I kid you not. You may well consider the expression "flavour of the month" appropriate – the only problem being that the last time I checked my calendar the average month contained substantially less than 365 days(!!!)

Does it please me that the John Birts and Peter Salmons of this world are choking on their Coco Pops when they read about the Edmonds phenomenon each day in their daily rags? Do I look as if I'm shedding tears for them? But on a more serious note, the global communications industry is the beneficiary of the current Edmonds boom, thank you very muchly. To my mind – and remember, I've been in this business for thirty-odd years, for my sins! – DND marks a whole new era in the history of the televisual medium.

I walk into a big store, now – absolute madness, I kid you not. I bring the whole place to a halt. People just want to come up and talk about DND – that's Deal Or No Deal to those of you who may just happen to reside on The Planet Zog! They either want to say, "It's just so great to see you back on television where you rightly belong, Noel," or they want to say, "Thanks for bringing a little sunshine into our lives. The new Edmonds showcase is the greatest thing since the proverbial French Loaf. We're all total Noel Edmonds nutcases in our family."

I'll chuck you a f'r'instance. I go into a newsagent the other day, I won't deign to name it, but a major newsagent in North Honiton and surrounding areas. I take this huge great pile of newspapers to the counter. "Just checking the rubbish about yours truly that the gutter press has managed to dredge up from the murkiest depths of their imaginations today!" I chuckle good-naturedly.

Well, the girl behind the counter looks a total blank. It soon becomes clear to moi that she is a fully-paid up resident of The Planet Zog. So I ask her very politely if the manager is about.

Up comes the manager, all smiles. I smile back – it's the least you can do when you're in the public eye, as I am – and I show him my huge great pile of newspapers. "Just checking the rubbish about yours truly the gutter press has managed to dredge up from the murkiest depths of their imaginations today!" I chuckle, good-naturedly, adding "Yes it's Noel Edmonds!" and stretching out my right hand for the proverbial shake.

"Ah, Noel Edmonds," he replies – and he shakes my hand. And, yes, I do feel truly humbled by this gentleman's recognition. And remember – he is just one of 60 million-odd viewers in this country who are truly delighted to see my face back on their televisions. But what of his assistant, I hear you ask! A little bird tells me that someone may be overdue for the the proverbial boot!!!

What makes GT (Great Television)? If I knew the answer to that, I'd be worth a lot more than the £20 million I was credited with in last year's Sunday Times Rich List (five places up on last year, three on the year before) – and I'd have added a gold-plated Daimler to my modest string of luxury vehicles which already includes two Ferraris, a Bentley, a 1937 Lagonda and a Roller!

But, yes, DND (Deal or No Deal – do I have to spell it out?!) is Great Television. Of that I am one hundred per cent confident. When the history of the 21st century comes to be written, you can be assured it will have earned its rightful place. To my mind, it's up there with the golden days of Civilisation, The World at War, Top Gear, House Party, Swap Shop and Telly Addicts. And believe me they don't come much better than that.

So what makes it truly great television? For me, it's the sight of – let's face it – very poor people, bless 'em, being offered what must be for them a very substantial sum of money by a well-loved television personality, who's basically the God figure – and then maybe – just maybe – having that same sum of money snatched away from them at the last minute, generally because they've haven't learnt to control their limitations. Things don't come much more dramatic or moving than that. It's the Hamlet story all over again, only this time in modern dress and with a stronger storyline.

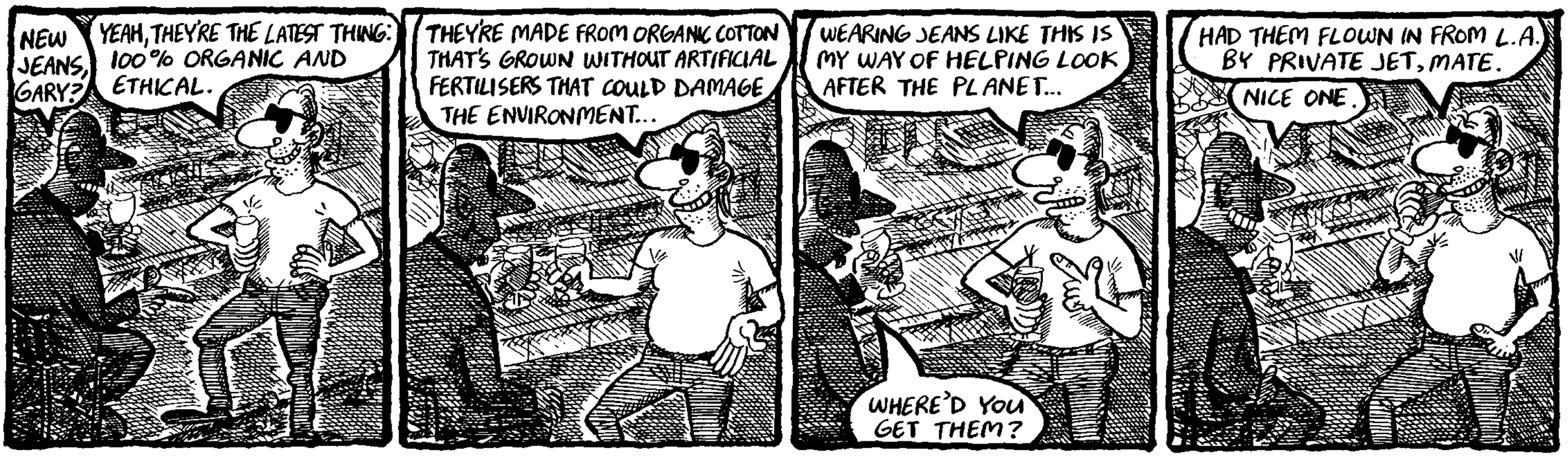
Pity my poor old agent – he's knee-deep in mega-offers at the moment. It's pure mayhem. Lots of people in this industry would like to be in my shoes at present. Too right they would. But what I always say is – sorry, chum, but my feet are already in full occupancy of the aforementioned pair of shoes: if you want to establish yourself as a professional in a decent pair of hard-wearing shoes over a thirty year period, you will have to go out and buy your own.

Where to purchase your own pair of shoes? Easy. There are these places called shops. And once you've had the common decency to buy your own shoes, please don't come running to Noel Edmonds and ask him to polish them for you. For crying out loud! Give them an inch and they'll take the proverbial mile! Frankly, I sometimes I think I'm just a bit too easy-going for this job. I must learn to be on the look-out. Blink, and the bloke behind you with the knife pointed at your back will only take advantage.

Veritable forests of perfectly decent trees have been laid waste so that the gentlemen (and I employ the term in terms of its loosest possible terminology) of the press can speculate about the meaning of the ancient mystic symbols daubed on the wrists and forearms of Monsieur Noel Edmondo.

So let me set their minds at rest. It's perfectly simple, and it's called Cosmic Ordering. It's not let me down once. I asked for a mega-hit game show. I got it. I asked for a beautiful house somewhere sunny. I got it. I asked to be the envy of every single person in this great industry of ours. I got it. Thanks to Cosmic Ordering I've got all a man could want. But there's just room on the old wrist for one last request from Great Uncle Cosmos, and I just scribbled it there with my trusty $15,000 Mont Blanc. "Give me the world," I wrote. "And I promise you this. I'll keep it glued to its set."

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


NEW JEANS, GARY?
YEAH, THEY'RE THE LATEST THING: 100% ORGANIC AND ETHICAL.
THEY'RE MADE FROM ORGANIC COTTON THAT'S GROWN WITHOUT ARTIFICIAL FERTILISERS THAT COULD DAMAGE THE ENVIRONMENT...
WEARING JEANS LIKE THIS IS MY WAY OF HELPING LOOK AFTER THE PLANET...
WHERE'D YOU GET THEM?
HAD THEM FLOWN IN FROM L.A. BY PRIVATE JET, MATE.
NICE ONE.

Literary Review

Cash versus cachet

AND SO, somewhat to the surprise of the City analysts and greatly to the disquiet of the dozens of authors subsequently questioned by the broadsheets, the Competition Commission chose to "end the uncertainty" hanging over Ottakar's by allowing HMV's bid for the book-selling chain to go through.

Although the deal is by no means done and dusted, the likely outcome is that an idiosyncratic, smaller-size outfit, keen on things like local interests and store autonomy, will be swallowed up by a high-street titan (HMV's subsidiary, Waterstone's) to create an even larger monolith, low on consumer choice (Waterstone's likes to do its buying centrally) whose shelves will creak beneath the weight of massive discounted tat.

A slight exaggeration, maybe; but try selling the concept of a Waterstone's/Ottakar's amalgam to one of the country's small, independent publishers, many of whose wares don't appear on the Waterstone's tables merely because the management can't be bothered to deal with their representatives.

Quite by chance, the week of the Wottakar's wave-through coincided with this year's British Book Awards, each of its 12 sponsored categories voted for by the public. And the popular choice, ladies and gentlemen? Well, "Book of the Year" was the last Harry Potter, with "Amazon Biography of the Year" picked up by that altogether dazzling artefact, Mrs Sharon Osbourne's *Extreme*. As the judges limbered up to reveal the "Outstanding Achievement Award", you could hear the audience draw in its collective breath in anticipation. Would it be Nobel laureate Harold Pinter? Or perhaps Man Booker winner John Banville? No, bless us all, it was that Pegasus of the pen, Jamie Oliver.

In faint mitigation, Alan Bennett was proclaimed "Reader's Digest Author of the Year"; but the damage was done and the whole event painfully symbolic of the depths to which the British book trade is currently reduced.

First, the ancient contexts are disappearing. In the not-so-very old days, most publishers had two yardsticks to work by: economic and cultural. Now they have only one. Second, the industry's power base has once again shifted in a way that has publishers chasing their margins – from the primary producer (the successful author abetted by his predatory agent) to the distributor, that is, the bookseller, who, in the case of many a modern much-hyped title, can end up charging the publisher money for shelf-space.

"You want a book published? – you're not on television and you want a book published?"

Lurking beneath this retail paradise, in which works by Madame Osbourne are taken very seriously indeed, is a third difficulty, of particular consequence for the thousands of bedsitter habitués struggling to write the novel that will knock Nabokov into a cocked hat. Far more people, it seems, want to write books these days than to read them or buy them. Not long ago, the *Times Literary Supplement* – deviously extrapolating from the CVs of contributors to a Birkbeck MA anthology – calculated that more than 1,000 creative writing students are now at work on their first novels. Who is going to publish them?

Every so often there arrives at the *Eye* a self-published paperback by a debut author accompanied by a letter listing his or her rejections and wondering why the industry no longer has a place for talent. There is no honest answer, other than to say that, as currently constituted – ever bigger firms, ever fewer books selling ever more copies – the London book world simply excludes more and more readers and writers from its grasp.

What's to be done? Third coincidence of the month is the appearance of the first half-dozen novels in the Macmillan "New Writing" venture, a low-risk, profit-sharing scheme designed to encourage debutants. The books, alas, fall into that time-honoured category of worthy but faintly dull. Nothing in any of them is quite as funny as the self-regarding paperback (*Transparent Imprint* by Michael Barnard) published alongside as a way of demonstrating just how fabulously enlightened everybody at Macmillan has suddenly become.

Silently, without ever quite wanting to admit the fact, publishing is becoming steadily more bi-polar, dividing into small firms who want to publish literature and big firms who want to make money. One obvious way ahead – something that really would encourage the "choice" that the Competition Commission is so keen on – would be for the big conglomerates to band together and start their own retail chains. But for the moment, the satrapies of the high street are here to stay and the commission is not going to stop the trade cutting its own throat.

Books & Bookmen

■ LARGELY thanks to Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, Bloomsbury announced record pre-tax profits of £20M last week. Awash with magical dosh, the publisher is embarking on an amazing spending spree.

It has paid £400,000 to lure William Boyd from Penguin for his next book, Restless; more than £500,000 to Ronan Bennett for Zugzwang, currently available free of charge on the Observer's website; £1m for the memoirs of Gary Barlow (Who he? – Ed.), formerly of boyband Take That; and a flabbergasting £1.9m to historian William Dalrymple for five books about India.

It's unlikely these advances will ever be recovered – and downright impossible that David Blunkett's diaries (due in October) will justify the £400,000 contract negotiated by his wily agent Ed Victor. With political memoirs, much of the revenue comes from newspaper serialisations. But despite its vast outlay, Bloomsbury hasn't acquired the serial rights. It'll have to earn back the £400,000 purely through sales of the book, including Braille and large-print editions.

Will Blunkett's revelations be as big as his type-size? After his resignation last November, Weidenfeld publisher Alan Samson offered £400,000 for his autobiography – so long as it promised "full disclosure". Blunkett declined, explaining to Samson that if he wrote a no-holds-barred memoir he would have to leave the country.

So the Blunkett diaries may be disappointingly short of bombshells. Still, he should at least outsell Bloomsbury's other political title of the autumn: Gordon Brown's Selected Speeches 1997-2006, all 500 pages of them. As a spoonful of sugar to help Gordon's medicine go down, it'll include a tribute to the chancellor from his wife's best friend – one JK Rowling.

Bloomsbury announced last week that "all royalties" from the Brown book will be donated to charity. Er, what royalties?

■ AUTHOR and erstwhile parfumier Naim Attallah is outraged by the suggestion that many of his published works – including two novels – were in fact ghost-written.

Although the phantom in question, Jennie Erdal, has confirmed the story in her entertaining memoir Ghosting, Attallah still seems to be in a state of denial. In a long letter to the Observer on 2 April, he protested at the paper's "preposterous" insinuation that he couldn't write coherent English without assistance. "It is astonishing that anyone should believe me to be inarticulate and illiterate, when I have now written three books in one year without the ghost of Jennie Erdal."

Quite true. And who published these three books? Quartet Books, owned by one Naim Attallah.

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ WHAT's new at the Library and Information Show?" asks the invitation to the annual librarians' exhibition-come-convention at the NEC in Birmingham this month. Not books, it would appear.

The list of exhibitors hypes CD "listening posts", animated message display screens, "minimalistic steel" display shelving, "personalised access" to more than 2m blogs and "beautifully crafted, custom-made" library furniture. But in a 1,100-word promo books get just one mention – and they're the books on librarianship training from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information professionals.

Meanwhile, the number of books in public libraries continues to decline. Culture Minister David Lammy recently told parliament that the national book stock had increased compared with 2002. He later admitted that although more new books were bought in 2004-5 than in previous years, the rate at which old copies are being chucked into skips (see *Eyes passim*) means stock has dropped from 92m books in 2002 to 85m.

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
WHAT WE WANT IS A NO-HOLDS-BARRED ACCOUNT OF THE BLUNKETT YEARS
BOOK DEAL
IT'S WORTH 400,000 DOG BISCUITS!
THEY'RE BARKING!
THE SADIE TAPES –

Me and missus Jones

Tourism

Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal

(Vintage paperback original, £7.99)

A FIRST novel can be an embarrassing thing. One day you may come to regret ever writing it; you will probably come to regret seeing it published; and already, if you are Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, you should be regretting being interviewed about it by everyone and Lynn Barber's dog in the broadsheets.

For only fame can buy you such coverage – or fame by association. This is Nirpal's route: he is married to Liz Jones, the most psychiatrically challenged of all current newspaper columnists. So candid are her highly paid blatherings that anyone who reads them now knows more than they will ever need to know about Nirpal, who is younger than her (32) and marginally less anal, failing consistently to put away the plates in alphabetical order. Presumably so many hacks are interviewing him because they all want to ask him the same question. Why on earth did you marry her? Why put yourself through it? Wasn't there something easier you could have done, like sky-diving without a parachute?

But there was bound to be a novel at the end of it, of course there was. Nirpal is like any young writer on the make. He will do anything to get noticed, because he knows that in publishing, talent isn't enough. Or strictly necessary. Sometimes it's even a disadvantage. What counts is a sort of wild blinkered confidence, a total absence of self-doubt, which in this case means being able to say in your author biog "He lives in Hackney" and believe that this genuinely counts for something. Perhaps he should have used it for the title of his novel: *He Lives In Hackney*. Nothing could more effectively deter the casual purchaser from making the sort of mistake we all make from time to time: buying a novel we later wish to burn page by page.

Nirpal's hero is Bhupinder "Puppy" Singh Johal, a young London Asian wannabe writer who, it's reasonable to guess, has the same hair, face and eyebrows as his author. Faintly underemployed, but burdened by an interior monologue that simply won't shut up, he wanders through a series of mild adventures that give him apparently limitless opportunity to pass judgement on others. It's a hard life, being this cynical, charming and good-looking.

"Sexually ambitious," shrieks the blurb, "he is intent on living life to the full, regardless of the consequences." Puppy has an anorexic white model girlfriend called Sophie, but lusts after the more pneumatic charms of Sarupa, an unspeakable lawyer who is engaged to someone else. Poor old Puppy. The one thing in the whole world that doesn't fall at his feet, and that's the one he wants. It's a shame, because everybody else wants to have sex with him, possibly including Puppy himself. "I looked at myself in the mirror, and I liked what I saw." Go on, tell us something we don't know.

What has really wetted the hacks' whistles, though, is Nirpal/Puppy's endless editorialising about everything, an apparently unstoppable tidal wave of opinion that fills the spaces where plot and character should be. "Watching white guys play football is like watching them dance: they do it with such gauche and inept gusto." In a posh restaurant Puppy sneers at *Guardian* readers whose "faces bore the idealism, the vague suicidal melancholy of white English liberalism". The proles are just as bad. "I hate poor white people. No one is more stupid and useless." All these awful people everywhere, just getting in the way. It's like hanging around with a young hip Asian Richard Littlejohn who keeps telling you he's much better in bed than you are. "Every city has its easy pastimes, its easier women." No, sorry, that's enough.

The Nirpal phenomenon, though, is a perfect example of the media's tendency to eat itself. He is no novelist: his observations are relentlessly mundane, his characters all sound the same and he can't tell a story. No one outside half a dozen postal districts of central London could possibly find anything of interest here. No, self-absorption this acute qualifies him for only one job: rubbishy navel-gazing newspaper columnist.

This isn't a novel, then, so much as a job application. The people who he wants to impress will probably love it – indeed, William Leith and Julie Burchill have already supplied gushing encomia. And the rest of us can just let them get on with it, in their weird little bubble, intent on living life to the full.

FIRST DRAFTS

John Simpson

How to be a theatre reviewer

AFTER watching a production of Brian Friel's ***Faith Healer*** in Dublin, ***Daily Telegraph*** arts columnist Andrew O'Hagan is full of praise for Irish theatregoers. He has scarcely ever seen an audience "so rapt". As Ralph Fiennes tells O'Hagan, "they really listen, don't they?"

Three weeks earlier, however, O'Hagan wrote an equally ecstatic piece about London theatregoers who attended a play based on Steptoe and Son and kept chatting to one another throughout. There was, he raved, "nothing of the rather ecclesiastical atmosphere that hangs over the halls of the National Theatre. The audience were out for a good time and many of them didn't know how to behave in a theatre, which seems to me rather a good way of behaving in a theatre."

Unless you're in Dublin, presumably.

Easter Weekend
14 - 17 January 2006
Advertisement, Kenmore Hotel

London is what prevents me getting to London. But, as I travel, I do so in the belief that there's somewhere truly worth arriving: London. Only rarely have I felt that I've got there – that I'm where it's at, in the place to be. And although it's taken me a while to realize it (over ten years), this is what makes me want to keep on living here. In so many other places, you arrive and find yourself immediately there.

TOBY LITT, *Rough Guide to London By The Book*

Sunday evening brought dinner with friends, including a historian turned financier from Pakistan, a beautiful German media lawyer and a Frenchman with a passion for opera. Good food, good wine, good company. We discussed Milosevic's demise, the history and future of Afghanistan and, of course, Rene Zellweger's outfits.

ITN newsreader ANDREA CATHERWOOD, *Guardian*

Click Here To Worship: Performing Cyber-Puja In The Virtual Temple

The aim of this paper is to investigate claims that the Internet is instrumental in radically transforming religious beliefs and practices. This paper is particularly concerned with notions of sacred space and ritual performance, and the extent that these might be transformed in the move from offline to online contexts. A semiotic analysis of a Hindu Virtual Temple suggests that there is a possibility of demarcating distinct online sacred spaces, in a Durkheimian sense...

DR STEPHEN JACOBS, Cultures and Humanities seminar, University of Wolverhampton

Pseuds Corner

William Hunt's performances test his body and the audience's nerve. While playing and singing self-penned songs on guitar he places his body in a position of peril, either by hanging, spinning or standing on his head. For his newly commissioned work for MK G he will deliver a song submerged in a wheelie bin full of water.

Live Art event at Milton Keynes Gallery

...like a blade cutting through the air and, somehow, floating a few inches off the ground. Sharp, unencumbered, light, an insouciant Victorian cavalryman, here to add tone to what might otherwise be a vulgar brawl.

BRYAN APPLEYARD on David Cameron, *Sunday Times Magazine*.

Pseuds Corporate

"The SAMSUNG name is now written in English, expanding its global presence throughout the world. The name is superimposed over a dynamic new logo design, giving an overall image of dynamic enterprise. The elliptical logo shape symbolizes the world moving through space, conveying a distinctive image of innovation and change. The first letter 'S' and the last letter 'G' partially break out of the oval to connect the interior with the exterior, showing SAMSUNG's desire to be one with the world and to serve society as a whole."

Samsung website

CONTRIBUTORS: Matthew Phillips, Les Lanagan, Anon, Mike Wade, Carrie Wright, Adam Wright.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

PENSIONS

A bit rich...

WHAT's the difference between a government actuary who says that taxpayers should be asked to find several million quid to fill a hole in the MPs' pension scheme, and a parliamentary ombudsman who finds that official "maladministration" has cost tens of thousands of low paid workers their pensions and demands that the government compensate them?

Obviously, the former's instructions have to be followed to the letter while the latter can be safely ignored.

Conveniently for ministers they legally have no choice but to accept the government actuary's views, while the opposition doesn't dare criticise the payment as the law requiring it was brought in under the last Tory government.

There is, however, no such legislation to rescue impoverished workers who faithfully followed official advice to plough money into their company schemes, assured it would be safe, and now find that when their employers went bust with inadequate pension funds the government promise was completely empty.

The best excuse that the prime minister and Pensions Secretary John Hutton (pictured) could offer for leaving 85,000 workers and pensioners high and dry was that coughing up would cost an eye-watering £15bn. They presumably hoped that such a scary number would persuade everyone that the taxpayer couldn't possibly be asked to stump up for the government's misconduct. In fact the cost of doing so is significantly less, as the government calculation includes some glaring errors – such as assuming all those involved will live to 95 and failing to take any account of the reduced pension credits and state benefits they would be due if compensated. The true one-off figure is nearer to £6bn. But even this exaggerates the cost as it will be spread over decades and the annual bill is easily within the government's means.

If Tony Blair and Hutton can't understand this they could turn to their Treasury colleagues for an explanation. As Gordon Brown pointed out to parliament last year when dismissing a then £425bn public sector pension liability as a distraction: "What really matters for the public finances, of course, is the amount that has to be paid out each year for public pensions." Indeed it does – and "each year" the 85,000 could affordably be compensated at the same level as those "lucky" enough to have seen their employers' schemes wound up after the start of the new pension protection fund.

PS: In its near 40-year history, the parliamentary ombudsman's findings have only been dismissed twice – on both occasions under New Labour. Last time the claims of Japanese PoWs were rejected. So much for caring for the oldies.

PENSIONS for the wealthy, on the other hand, get better and better. "A-day" last week allowed tax relief on annual contributions of up to £215,000 and life time tax-free contributions of £1.5 million.

At the same time the vested interests who see pensions not as a means of giving old people a reasonable standard of living but as a gravy train that mustn't be stopped are also muscling in. With rumours that Tony Blair and Gordon Brown might reach an agreement on Lord Turner's proposals, the Assocation of British Insurers (ABI) is reported to be persuading Pensions Secretary John Hutton that its members should have a role in running Turner's proposed national pensions savings scheme. The argument goes that it would be a shame to let their expertise and infrastructure go to waste. The expertise of course runs to mis-selling personal pensions to millions, while their infrastructure has been built on the back of over-charging unsuspecting customers for decades – all of which should be familiar to the president of the ABI, Stephen Hadrill, formerly the Department of Trade's director of consumer affairs.

NOT everyone in local government believes, as Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott would have it, that pensions for council workers are unaffordable.

As a million workers prepared to strike last month, one authority, West Yorkshire, broke ranks. Its head of pensions and investments wrote to members to say that current arrangements, under which local authority employees can retire at 60 rather than 65 as long as they've done 25 years' service (the so-called "85 year rule"), were perfectly reasonable – and that he had told Prescott as much. Indeed, his fund manages to pay its pensions under existing rules and still has £150m to spare every year.

The message that decent pensions for some of the poorest paid workers in the country can be afforded by well-run schemes without unduly burdening the council taxpayer won't be welcome in Whitehall, however. And of course Two Jags will have the last word. Despite being able to afford it, even West Yorkshire will have to scrap retirement at 60 if that's what the "decentralising" government decides.

WAR ON POVERTY

No credit?

LESS than a year after the prime minister hosted the Gleneagles conference, there are signs that his anti-poverty commitments are proving as hollow as many sceptics feared.

Ministers from around the world, with Tony Blair at the forefront, promised to tackle the corruption crippling developing countries by "rigorously enforcing laws against the bribery of foreign public officials, including prosecuting those involved in bribery; strengthening anti-bribery requirements for those applying for export credits [ie taxpayer guarantees]..."

All very laudable: yet last week the all-party parliamentary committee on Africa, reporting on Britain's role in stamping out corruption, complained of "delays in domestic legislation, in enforcement of existing legislation, and in ratification of the UN Convention [against corruption] and... a dilution of ECGD [export credit] guidelines."

With diplomatic understatement the committee concluded: "These delays do not sit comfortably with the UK's wish to take a lead on African issues..." In other words, it's all very well greeting rock stars and fronting historic conferences – but that doesn't get anything done.

The dilution of export credit guidelines would have been even worse, however, if anti-corruption group The Corner House had not taken the then Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt to court over her initial cave-in to business lobbying. She was humiliatingly forced to reopen a review of the conditions for export guarantees, leading last month to her successor, Alan Johnson (pictured), agreeing to more anti-bribery checks. But even the rewritten rules are shot through with loopholes: for example, in giving potential bribers five days' notice before an audit (plenty of time to destroy the evidence); and not requiring disclosure of payments made by their affiliates (so a related company can make the bribe and nobody will be any the wiser).

Campaigners are calling for investigations into exporters' arrangements and the disclosure of findings, while the all-party Africa committee wants the government to introduce the anti-corruption bill it has been promising since 2003. Meanwhile, there has been no British prosecution to date.

CHARITY NEWS

Blind justice?

THE Royal London Society for the Blind has paid out more than £160,000 to one of its former managers whom it had sacked after she blew the whistle on what she alleged was a climate of bullying and fear at the Kent-based charity.

The payment to Tebiena Martin, believed to be one of the highest awards ever paid by a charity to settle a claim for unfair dismissal, was the second arising out of events at the society. Allister Kay, its human resources manager, had earlier successfully claimed that he was also forced out when he tried to investigate Mrs Martin's allegations of harassment and bullying against Brian Cooney, former head teacher and now the RLSB chief executive.

Matters at the RLSB, which provides education and training for the visually impaired, became so bad that a number of staff and two former trustees lodged a complaint with the Charity Commission, which in August 2004 condemned the RLSB's employment practices and decision-making.

Mrs Martin, 52, from Tunbridge Wells, had been a senior manager at Dorton College, which is part of the RLSB. With others at the college and at Dorton House School she said she was subjected to sustained bullying and harassment. Following an attempt to raise her concerns with Howard Hughes, until recently the chair of the charity, Mrs Martin lodged her complaint against Mr Cooney in June 2002. She was then suspended and marched off the premises even though her last appraisal had said she was "an invaluable member of the senior management team, honest, supportive and with a keen analytical mind".

Mrs Martin brought her claim for unfair dismissal under the Public Interest Disclosure Act, designed to protect whistleblowers. Although the RLSB accepted liability for her claims, it denied the claims of bullying and harassment and said its actions were to save further charity money. It maintained it had always had highly favourable inspection reports.

Of course its settlement spared it hearing further damning evidence from a dozen witnesses, including former staff and trustees. "They felt that anyone who had the courage to speak up and question decisions would sooner or later find themselves in the firing line, lose their job or even suffer further bullying, harassment and intimidation," wrote one.

Because of the tribunal case, none of Mrs Martin's evidence was put before the Charity Commission; and despite the commission's own findings of poor management, it decided to take no further action because the trustees had undertaken to improve things and ensure that senior staff were "effectively monitored".

How has this been achieved? By awarding Mr Cooney a 10 percent pay rise, taking his salary into six figures!

■ The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) mailed 19,000 supporters to tell them it is going to increase automatically the amount of money it takes from their bank accounts by direct debit for an adopt-a-dolphin scheme – unless they write back telling them not to.

Unfortunately, this get-out is buried away on the second page of the letter, by which time many people will have binned it, unaware of the rising cost to them.

While it's not unusual for companies to play hard ball with customers, should a conservation charity be treating its loyal donors the same way? Some WDCS supporters think not and have accused the charity of trying to pull a fast one. WDCS, however, is unmoved and says it may use the method again.

EXPERT WITNESSES

Fuel for thought

ANNETTE HEWINS, a mother of five, has finally won her 11-year battle to clear her name after she was wrongly jailed for an arson attack which killed Diane Jones and her two toddlers, Shauna and Sarah-Jane.

Mrs Hewins dropped her damages claim against South Wales Police in return for an apology and declaration that she played no part in the murders in Merthyr Tydfil in October 1995. Although she was freed in 1999 by the appeal court which quashed her conviction for arson with intent to danger life, the police had implied that she was released on a technicality and was still a suspect. Now the force has apologised for the "distress" she has been caused. In return she accepted that the police did not act maliciously.

The apology, coming so late, highlights once more the role of expert witnesses in miscarriages of justice. For the case against Annette Hewins rested solely upon whether she had obtained petrol and supplied it to her niece, Donna Clarke, who was accused of setting fire to the Jones' house.

Tests conducted on carpet from Jones' home indicated that the petrol used in the fire was unleaded. Yet CCTV footage showed that on the night in question, Mrs Hewins had in fact bought leaded petrol at a garage. That might have suggested that the prosecution had the wrong person. But Dr Andrew Sweeting, the crown's expert witness, had carried out a rather strange test. He sprayed leaded petrol on to his laboratory coat – not on to carpet similar to that in the Jones house – set fire to it and, after putting out the flames, tested for tetraethyly lead (TEL), the tell-tale component of leaded petrol. As he did not find any, he concluded that the petrol in the Jones house could have been leaded petrol after all.

Although this methodology was later strongly criticised – the use of the lab coat, the failure to look for other identifying petrol properties, the failure to find out what quantities of petrol were needed to detect TEL, this damning evidence was not challenged at trial. And it was only in 2000 that new forensic experts working with the police accepted that it was most likely the petrol used to torch the Jones house was indeed unleaded.

Why has it taken a further six years for the police to accept publicly that Mrs Hewins had no involvement in the fire at all? And where does this leave the case against her niece, against whom charges lie on the file? It was the crown's case that Donna Clarke was given leaded petrol by Hewins which she then used in the fire. But Hewins had no involvement in the fire. So there is no evidence that Clarke had access to petrol, nor the vital opportunity to obtain it in time to start the fire that tragically cost a young woman and her infant daughters their lives.

HOLY CROSS CONVENT

Nuns on run

THE *Eye* has often criticised local authorities and private education firms for flogging off school sites and land to make a quick buck. Now in affluent Chalfont St Peter, Buckinghamshire, it seems nuns are getting in on the act.

There is concern that after 78 years the Sisters of the Holy Cross are about to sell off their independent girls' school and its surrounding acres. In January, trustees for the Sisters shocked parents and pupils by announcing that they were withdrawing their support from the Holy Cross Convent School. Declining numbers meant that as an international order they had to concentrate their "human financial and premises resources" where there was greatest need. Therefore they could no longer commit the "substantial resources" needed to support the school and its 236 pupils, who pay up to £10,000 a year.

The parents cannot deny that the needs of the developing world outweigh their own; but it is the way in which the Sisters announced the closure – with little consultation and no time for the parents to launch a rescue plan that would satisfy their criteria – that has upset them. So has the fact that the school has just signed up a new cohort of children, while others are in the middle of their GCSEs and A levels.

Parents say the school's recent losses of some £150,000 a year had been stemmed by an increase in the school roll and in fees. Nor is the trust, a registered charity, exactly impoverished. As well as the 24-acre site on which the school stands, it owns other property, holds £5.8m in unit trusts and has £1.5m on deposit.

Anxious to save the school, parents and teachers raised an immediate £500,000 and drew up a £5m rescue plan to buy and run it, with the promise to provide for the few elderly Sisters who still live in the convent. But the offer has just been rejected because the Sisters did not believe it would guarantee the school's long-term future. The parents believe that despite an early assurance that the Sisters "have no wish to accumulate vast sums on the sale of the land", the real reason their offer was rejected was because they can't compete with the open market on such a lucrative site.

LEGAL AID

Ministerial red face

WHEN David Main lost his wife and nine-year-old daughter in the November 2004 train crash at a level crossing in Ufton Nervet, Berkshire, he naturally wanted to know if the accident could have been avoided and what lessons could be learned.

A Great Western train ploughed into a car parked on the crossing killing five rail passengers, the train driver and the driver of the car, Brian Drysdale.

During pre-inquest hearings the solicitor Mr Main had hired, Louise Christian – an expert in rail safety – raised two safety issues for the coroner to explore. They were whether trains should be fitted with a detection system to alert train drivers to an obstacle on a level crossing; and whether laminated windows in the train would have prevented casualties. Mr Main's wife Anjanette and his daughter Louella were killed because they were ejected through the train windows which shattered on impact.

The coroner agreed that witnesses from Network Rail and Great Western Trains be called to answer these critical questions. He also believed it crucial to his inquiry into the crash that Mr Main be legally represented.

The Legal Services Commission agreed to fund Mr Main, waiving its normal means testing after hearing that he had not worked since the crash and would have to sell his and his son's home. But then Bridget Prentice (pictured), the minister with responsibility for legal aid, overruled it, saying Mr Main could be funded for advice but not for representation. This would mean, of course, that while the train and track operators would no doubt have ranks of lawyers at the inquest, he would have only himself.

Mr Main's advisers believe the minister's intervention unlawful and are seeking a judicial review. They say the wider public interest in ensuring a full investigation into such a disaster means the family should be represented and not have to bear the full costs of that representation. The judicial review, brought on behalf of the Main family, is funded by legal aid.

Thus in trying to preserve a relatively small amount of legal aid, the minister has managed to forced the commission to fork out far more to fund a judicial review to challenge her interference. Meanwhile the inquest is on hold.

POLICE 5

Suspended animation

DETECTIVE Inspector David Smith of Greater Manchester Police is proving to be as non-stick as his one-time colleague DI Kenny Caldwell (see *Eyes passim*). The Crown Prosecution Service announced last month that Smith, who was branded a liar by Dame Janet Smith during her inquiry into mass murderer Harold Shipman, will not face trial for perjury.

The CPS has decided there is insufficient evidence to charge Smith, 48, who has been suspended on full pay for two-and-a-half years. Earlier this year he also learnt that he and four other officers, including Caldwell, would not face criminal charges arising out of a £5m murder trial which collapsed after eight months amid allegations of serious police misconduct.

When the 2001 trial of six men accused of the murder of David Barnshaw folded, the judge said police failings were so serious he was referring the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions. While Caldwell was guilty of "extremely serious, deliberate and dishonest conduct", the judge accused Smith of not telling the truth about an informer.

In the Shipman case, the serial killer had already claimed most of his victims when Smith was called in to investigate. Dame Janet said he neither spoke to Shipman nor checked whether the doctor had a criminal record; and nor did he call for post-mortem examinations or poison tests on two victims. He then lied about his failings to both his superiors and the inquiry. Dame Janet said his failings were largely because he was out of his depth and poorly supervised.

The inquiry concluded that the lives of three of Shipman's patients would probably have been saved if the police investigation had been properly conducted and supervised.

But it remains to be seen whether Smith will face disciplinary action over the Shipman affair or indeed the Barnshaw debacle. Caldwell, *Eye* readers will recall, escaped any such censure by retiring.

In video veritas

POLICE who arrested a 70-year-old animal rights protestor outside Harrods were given a ticking off in court, after their own video evidence showed that the protest last October was entirely peaceful.

Roger Harris was arrested by officers from the Metropolitan Police, under section 14 of the Public Order Act, for participating in a protest against fur outside the phoney pharaoh's store. His small group had been holding placards and handing out flyers. The police report stated that section 14 had been invoked because of "inconvenience and disruption" to shoppers on the pavement. Section 14 should only be used if police believe there is a reasonable likelihood of "serious public disorder", trespassing or damage to property.

On 9 March at Horseferry Road Magistrates' Court, district judge Snow dismissed the case, noting that the police view that the protestors' placards were "disturbing" (not something that apparently bothered them at the cartoon protests) was also not a reason to invoke section 14.

Eye readers may recall that Mr Harris won £5,000 compensation from Sussex Police over wrongful detention, malicious prosecution and false allegations of previous convictions in 2003 (*Eye* 1092). He says he's now considering civil legal action against the Met.

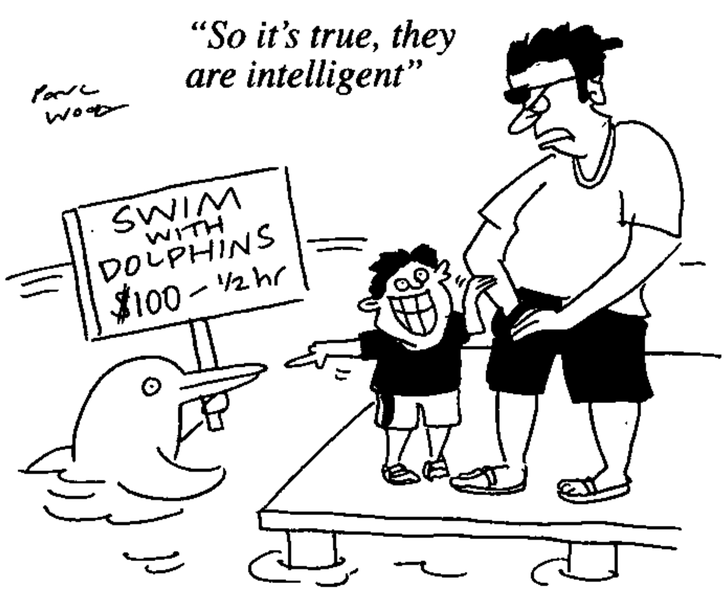
Harrods stopped selling fur in 1989, with its then media director Michael Cole explaining that "the trade is not as acceptable now as it used to be". It has since restarted and is now the only major department store in the country selling real animal furs.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE Scotland Yard and Electoral Commission investigations into the loans-for-peerages scandal is certain to focus on the "commercial terms" on which so many chequebooks were opened for Labour and the Tories to provide £35m.

Given that both parties appear to have limited ability to borrow from banks on real commercial terms – mainly because of the little matters of repayment and security – the loan arrangements now disclosed look anything but "commercial". Just what therefore were the "commercial terms" on which these loans were made should be published so a true comparison can be drawn.



"So it's true, they are intelligent"

Electoral law specifies that a loan must be disclosed only if the preferential interest charge costs at least £5,000 less than from a bank. But what about the real intention to repay or to request repayment? What about the real intention to pay interest? What about security? All the basic "terms" of any genuine commercial loan.

The deal would seem to have normally been that any loan would either be rolled over at the end of the initial term or ultimately forgiven. Furthermore, the interest may have been at market rates, but again this was usually to be rolled up until repayment. Once again, if the loan was forgiven so presumably was the interest. We should all have such "commercial" lenders!

If loan repayment was waived along with the interest, were such gifts in the past reported to the Electoral Commission as donations, which is what in reality they became? The suspicion must be that on past occasions this has not happened and so secret lenders have in effect been able to make undeclared donations. How were such loans/ write-offs handled in the party accounts?

The paperwork, if it exists, for the existing loans should tell the story. But the investigation should look at all loans made since the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act of 2000, as well as the 1925 Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act triggered by Lloyd George and his bagman, Maundy Gregory.

(Not only was Bonar Law forgotten last time in discussing the Lloyd George scandal – see Letters – but Lord Crathorne, who raised the right questions about Wilson's Lavender List, was wrongly identified as a Labour instead of a Tory peer.)

Those quickly-repaid Tory donors who gave £5m under conditions of secrecy hardly give confidence that their loans were truly "commercial" or without an agenda. As Dr Johnson declared, where secrecy goes, roguery is usually not far behind. These may well be foreign donors only in the sense that their money has come from offshore trusts or companies while they live here or are British nationals.

One of the Tories' more colourful donors has been Johan Eliasch, the Swedish-born Head sportswear chairman resident in London who has been deputy party treasurer since 2003. Eliasch has outstanding loans to the Tories of £2.6m. In the past, presumably before he became a British citizen and so eligible to give, Eliasch made donations through British companies he controlled. This is a curious and much-used loophole, which enables foreigners to make donations to British political parties.

Eliasch made a disclosed £250,000 donation in October 2002. This was credited to a company called Millcentro which was renamed ECJ Investments on the same day it made the large donation. Millcentro/ECJ never filed any accounts and was struck off in December last year. In April 2003 Eliasch made a smaller donation of £10,000 through another company, Equity Partners. This was struck off in August 2004 having produced no accounts after those for 2001! No doubt there were good reasons for such companies being used to make political donations.

Meanwhile back at the Labour lenders list there is further embarrassment for property developer Sir David Garrard who provided £2.3m after his offshore trusts had cashed in Minerva shares worth £35m, over his past connection to solicitor Michael Fielding, jailed for eight years in November for stealing almost £6m from clients.

Fielding worked with Garrard at Land Investors in the 1980s, then for Minerva from 1992, becoming its legal adviser and a director of a key company, Minerva Corporation, with Garrard and fellow founder Andrew Rosenfeld (who also loaned Labour £1m) until 1994.

At his trial it emerged that Fielding was in financial difficulties from the early 1990s due to loans he had guaranteed regarding his law firm. He had hoped the Minerva flotation in 1996 would bail him out. For whatever reason it did not. Fielding – no doubt unfairly – blamed Garrard. Fielding began stealing from clients at Lawrence Graham after 1997. The whole unhappy episode doubtless came as a complete shock to Garrard and Rosenfeld.

THE acquittal of former TransTec chief executive Richard Carr last month on false accounting charges, after finance director William Jeffrey pleaded guilty, is unlikely to be the end of the road for inquiries into the 1999 collapse of the company founded by Labour MP Geoffrey Robinson.

The Department of Timidity & Inaction is expected to press ahead with proceedings already launched to disqualify Carr from being a director.

Three other TransTec directors including Jeffrey, who was given a surprisingly lenient suspended sentence after serving several weeks in custody during the trial, have already been disqualified by the DTI without any public announcement because of the impending trial: Jeffrey for nine years from February this year; Richard Parkin for four and a half years from January 2005; and Peter Summerfield for three and a half years from November 2004.

The Joint Disciplinary Scheme for accountants also has Carr as well as TransTec auditor PricewaterhouseCoopers in its sights and its investigation is expected to proceed, despite Carr's acquittal.

The DTI does not have much option given the scathing verdict on Carr made by its inspectors, Hugh Aldous and Roger Kay, in their 2003 report. Carr, it was said, had made "serious errors of conduct", shown a "lack of leadership and ethical management" and could not shuffle off responsibility to Jeffrey and Parkin.

The chief executive had not informed the TransTec board or the auditors of a $36m claim from Ford and a resulting $18m settlement. At his trial Carr testified that the payment was a "cost down payment" for future business, not compensation, and as such did not have to be disclosed. Jeffrey had accepted it was a liability and should have been disclosed. Carr denied any dishonesty.

The jury clearly believed Carr but the inspectors saw matters very differently. They saw Carr's actions as deserving "serious criticism". "Mr Carr we think deluded himself and continues to do so," concluding that he had shown "an unwillingness to face personal criticism and admit mistakes" as a result "his inability to face up to facts means that he is unsuited to the office of a director of a public company".

THE TransTec result, following the collapse last year of the SSL prosecution, will again raise questions about how the Serious Farce Office prosecutes complex accounting frauds where there is no question of personal theft by directors.

Juries seem to find such cases hard to follow and, not surprisingly, get lost in the accounting niceties. After all, few if any jurors are likely to be accountants.

TransTec took more than three years to bring to trial, almost three months to try and cost in total maybe up to £3m. It is such cases that are likely to be suggested for judge-alone trials if such a change in the law, as desired by Labour, ever comes about.

But there are ways of trying accountancy-based frauds successfully, especially where there is clear evidence of personal gain above and beyond just saving the director's job and his share options. The

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

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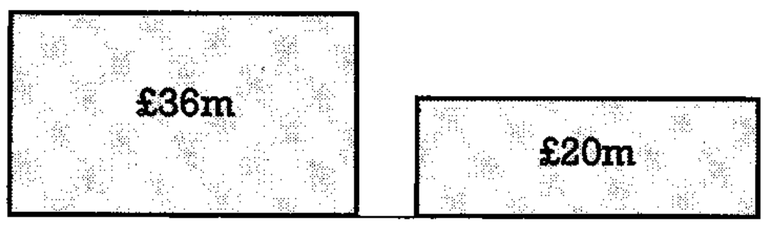
ORDER.
GREAT-BUT HOW CAN WE MEET THIS PRICE?
EASY! WE'LL MAKE THE STUFF IN CHINA!
206.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

French Connection shareholders: fcuk'd

Value of the shares that CEO Stephen Marks sold two years ago...



...what he sold them for

...what they're worth today

ongoing *Enron* trial in Houston is evidence of this. So too is how justice Texas-style moves at a pace, even with juries, that the SFO and the UK taxpayer who foots the billion-pound plus legal aid bill for major fraud cases here can only envy.

The trial of Enron's top duo Ken Lay and Jeffrey Skilling was described by prosecutors in their opening as "not about the accounting but about the lies". Thirty-two days and 22 witnesses later the prosecution case was completed. Instead of delving into Byzantine accounting arguments about why Enron collapsed in 2001, federal prosecutors stayed away from those areas where there are as many opinions as experts regarding accounting rules and treatments. Instead they concentrated on what Lay and Skilling told or did not tell employees, shareholders and Wall Street compared with the evidence of insiders, most of whom have agreed to testify after pleading guilty to criminal offences.

Initially the defence tried to take the jury into the complex areas but the trial judge Sim Lake ruled out anything that was not essential. Oh that British judges were so rigorous in controlling their trials! Lake selected a jury in one day and restricted both prosecution and defence openings to one day in total, not each! The court sat just four days a week. When defence lawyers interrupted too often, Lake did not hesitate to say: "Sit down." Lake reckoned the trial would last 16 weeks. He is well on track. Most big SFO prosecution cases would still be dragging on after only 16 weeks.

Skilling is expected to begin giving evidence in his own defence this week followed by Lay. Skilling's testimony will test the truth of his response to the Harvard Business School dean who asked the candidate if he was smart. "I'm fucking smart," Skilling replied.

To date the Enron trial shows how fraud trials should be run, especially if, as expected, Lay and Skilling are convicted. Maybe it will encourage British judges to follow Judge Sim Lake's example.

THE phony pharaoh Mohamed Fayed was no doubt deeply upset to observe the enforced resignation of his old pal, Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Thaksin was forced out after his family pocketed some £1.1bn tax free and offshore from selling their telecoms empire to Singaporean interests. Fayed has been close to Thaksin ever since he developed ambitions to find oil in the Gulf of Thailand. Those ambitions have not been fulfilled by Harrods although oil has been produced from the Jasmine field, which Fayed sold in 2004, perhaps retaining a continued royalty interest.

It is no doubt completely coincidental that the Harrods Bank, which Fayed owns but is not a director and so clearly cannot influence, provided a mortgage in 1999 on a flat in London's St Martin's Lane, clearly on a proper commercial basis. The owner of the leasehold was Dr Surakiart Sathirathai. A Surakiart Sathirathai was at that time a director of the state-controlled oil company, PTT. That Sathirathai left PTT and joined Thaksin's party in 2000 becoming foreign minister (and later deputy prime minister) in 2001.

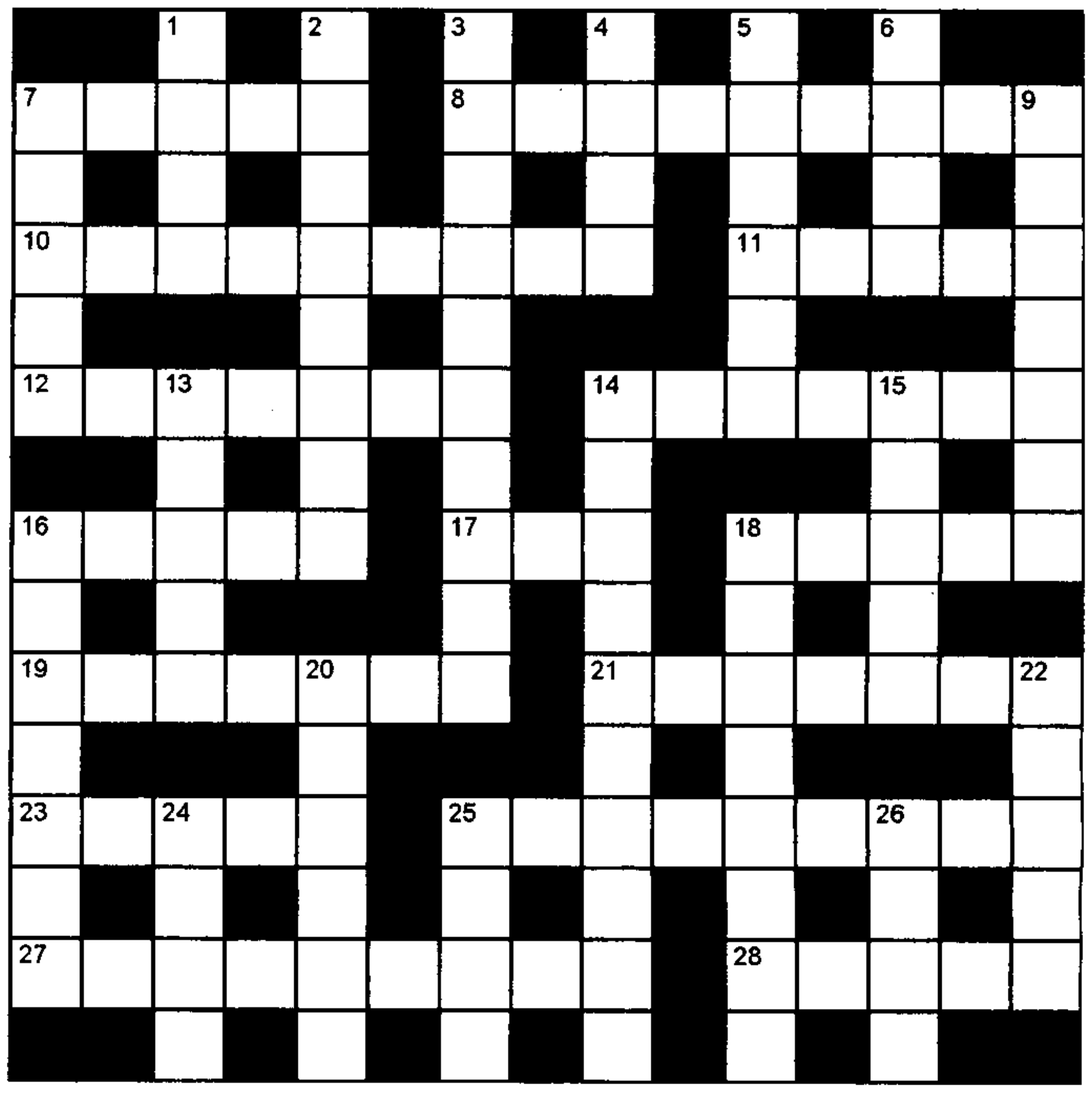
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 311

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 21 April 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 She usually does/doesn't have plenty up top (5)
8 Emulates Lord Lucan – bestial females answer: "Bed!" (4,1,4)
10/5/4 Rev. Blair's mouthpiece spins a lot, brainwashes – devious Alastair's head must go! (2,7,6,4)
11 To enter more firmly is accepted as part of group relations (3,2)
12 Auntie Beth rudely secretes the buzzer (3,4)
14 The tale about Linford Christie? (7)
16/17/18 Offensively inferior bloke swallowing ecstasy ordered Stan to be gobbled by Prince (5,3,5)
19 One returning to stuff Heath, got changed (7)
21 Not engendered, you might say, when it's in action (7)
23 Hot and woozy, very lacking Conservative front-bencher (5)
25 Arsehole in dire need has church going downhill morally (9)
27 Suicide bomber's aim: to blow up right mad Tory Malcolm's butt (9)
28 Little woman with runs has American illness (5)

DOWN

1 Express's leader article about twice-married luvvie (4)
2 Share a single bed and have a big laugh! (6,2)
3 Stupid management relied on by many a TV presenter? (5,5)
4 See 10ac.
5 See 10ac.
6 Screw, having changed top? That's gross! (4)
7 It takes live piss-artist to get infatuated (5)
9 A couple of shots did for him? Not if it was Charles! (7)
13 Forced evacuation has bearing on name change (5)
14 Perhaps Brenda's attendant "makes one decide to get screwed by a lot of mounties" (4-2-4)
15/24 Drugs and shagging followed by tart for a Dagenham piper, perhaps? (5,4)
16 Old haunt of sailors requiring intercourse on thigh (7)
18 Having sniffed, Cyclops has to go down pretty sharp (8)
20 My organ's sexy look (3,3)
22 *Red Peril*, debut of George Bush's no.3, is trash (5)
24 See 15dn.
25 Bust comes to a point – dandy! (4)
26 "Oaten's end brought by craft" – informant (4)

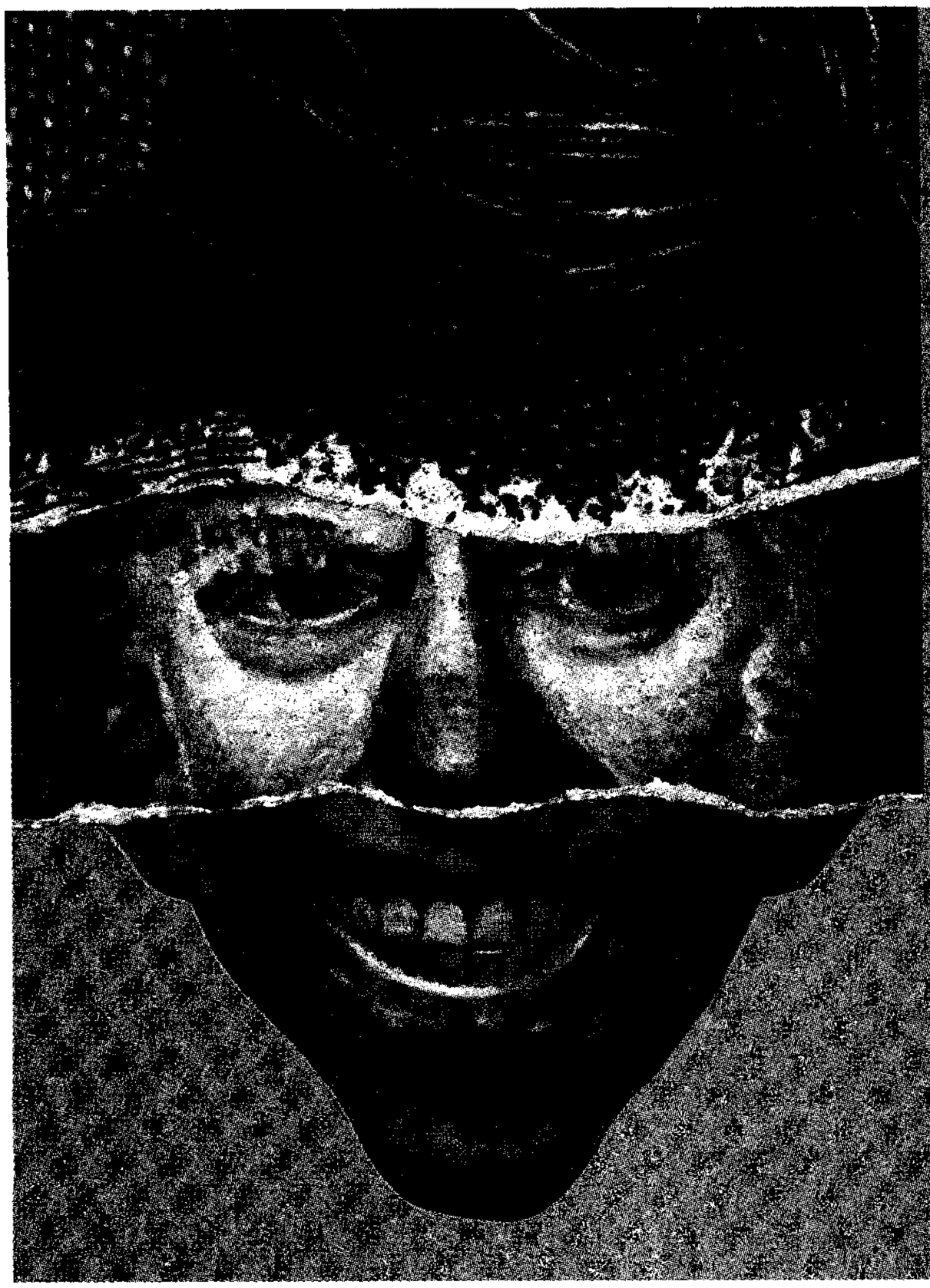
Crossword 310 winner: B. GLEESON

ACROSS: 1 Creche 5 Backlash 9 Screwing 10 Invest 11 Groper 12 Wet dream 13 Admen 14 Nutter 17 Heckle 19 Islam 22 Stuffing 24 Bust-up 25 Woodie 26 In the raw 27 Kneejerk 28 Ratbag.

DOWN: 2 Record 3 Cheapjack 4 Epigram 5 Big Swinging Dick 6 Clinton 7 Lover 8 Sashayed 15 Tumescent 16 Meltdown 18 Evil eye 20 Lobster 21 Guyana 23 Fudge.

HUSBAND

Whoa lads... cool it. What's this about? You're mates!!
I caught him shaggin' my bird!
Your bird!?... I've been goin' out with her for 6 months, You bastard!!



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OM SAI RAM

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The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that – a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up – he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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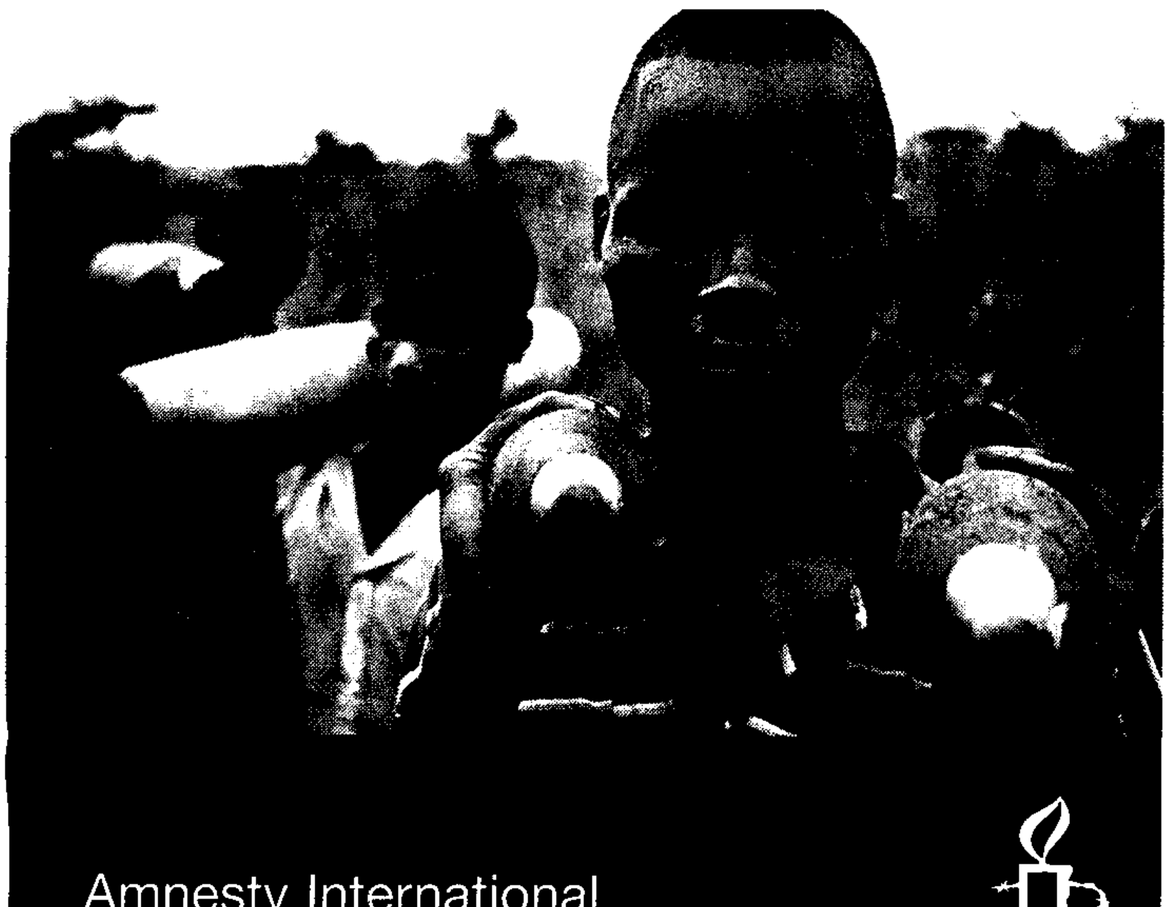

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NON-FUNDED postgraduate counselling course. Financial help appreciated. S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 74534132.

GOOD GUY DAD always paid maintenance privately, now struggling with unjust demands from Child Support Agency. Please help. S/C: 82-69-01. A/C: 20015812.

ARTISAN forced to retrain by brain tumour. Looking for something just as creative but less practically orientated. Need funds. S/C: 30-94-43. A/C: 1821087.

EX-PUBLIC SCHOOLBOY, 41. Wife stole children. Broken man. Need money to start again. Halifax, S/C: 11-05-02. A/C: 00289500.

DESERTED, UNEMPLOYED, father of two. Wife abandoned family at Christmas. Desperately need financial help. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 77-17-10. A/C: 35482460.

RECENTLY BEREAVED elderly widow left with debts of £6k,managing on government pension only. Any help much appreciated. S/C: 11-18-11. A/C: 12559811.

BRILLIANT CHILDREN'S Creative Learning Centre is under threat through lack of funding. Sponsorship needed urgently. See www.handsonhideaway.co.uk/sponsor.htm

WOMAN, 37, needs fresh start. £10k would change life. S/C: 63-90-90. A/C: 051271438200. Thanks.

BENT BIG FOUR accountants: £150k needed to fund action to slay the dragon. Any help appreciated. S/C: 05-09-41. A/C: 58206659. Log on to www.deloitte-ouch.com

ELDERLY CAT and female owner will be homeless and jobless at the end of June due to employer's duplicity. Please donate what you can to enable us to start again – he is all I have and I don't want to lose him. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Reply Box 161447.

HELP – struggling newly weds need 2.5k to help unexpected building costs after winter heating disaster in new home. Halifax, S/C: 11-18-11. A/C: 05235056.

HARD-WORKING Healthcare-worker struggling to support healthcare-student spouse. Book tokens or financial donations greatly appreciated. EGG, S/C: 40-61-99. A/C: 24787060. Reply Box 161457.

NOWHERE ELSE TO TURN: £15k debt draining low-income single mother. Please help give new start. Enormous thanks. Co-op, S/C: 08-90-02. A/C: 10061314.

PLEASE HELP. Need 5k to fulfil my Grandad's dream. S/C: 40-41-18. A/C: 01663569.

I NEED KINDNESS from strangers. Accidentally destroyed OAP's life savings, cannot fully repay 10K, guilt-ridden, please, please help. Nationwide, S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 51891302.

VIVACIOUS and committed female race driver (20) needs sponsors. www.sponsorsarahtorace.co.uk S/C: 77-26-13. 26591868.

DITCHED cheating bankrupt husband. Back with the parents. Single mum with young son. This WAS NOT the plan. S/C: 40-47-84. A/C: 21801317.

CRIPPLING 50K DEBT. Help me to save house. Barclays, S/C: 20-45-77. A/C: 50375675.

LIFE STARING BACK AT YOU. Adopted 3 girls under 4 years, lots of love to give, funds low, working hard but girls need daddy and mum needs hubby. S/C: 40-47-73. A/C: 01094084.

£30K IN DEBT, facing bankruptcy, any amount will help. NatWest, S/C: 52-21-63. A/C: 12717142.

PRIZE-WINNING Classical / Baroque soprano needs £6,000 for fees / subsistence while launching career. More details and demo CD: baroquesinger@hotmail.co.uk

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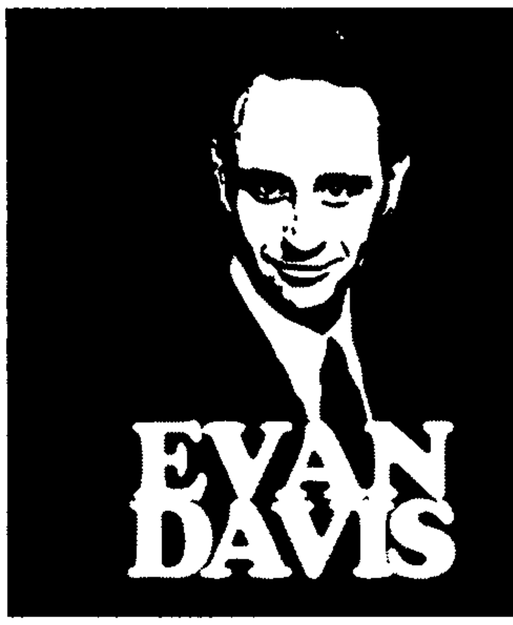

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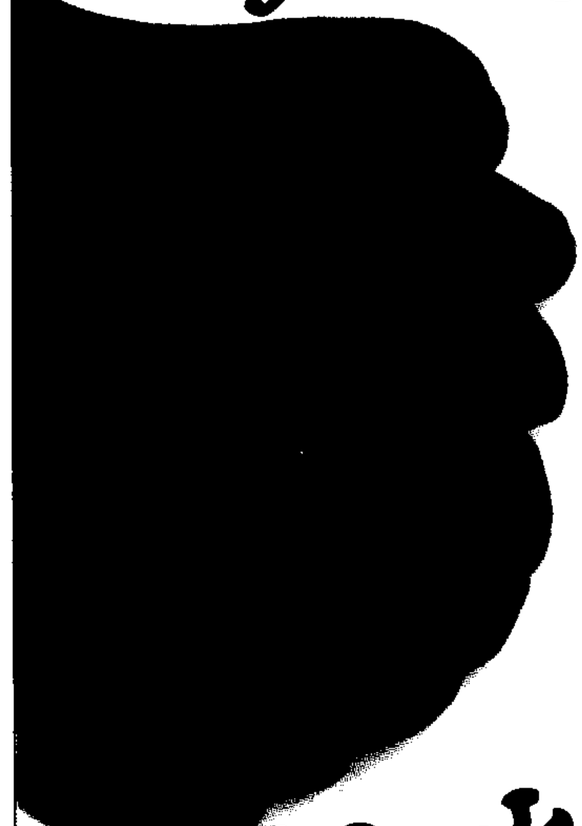

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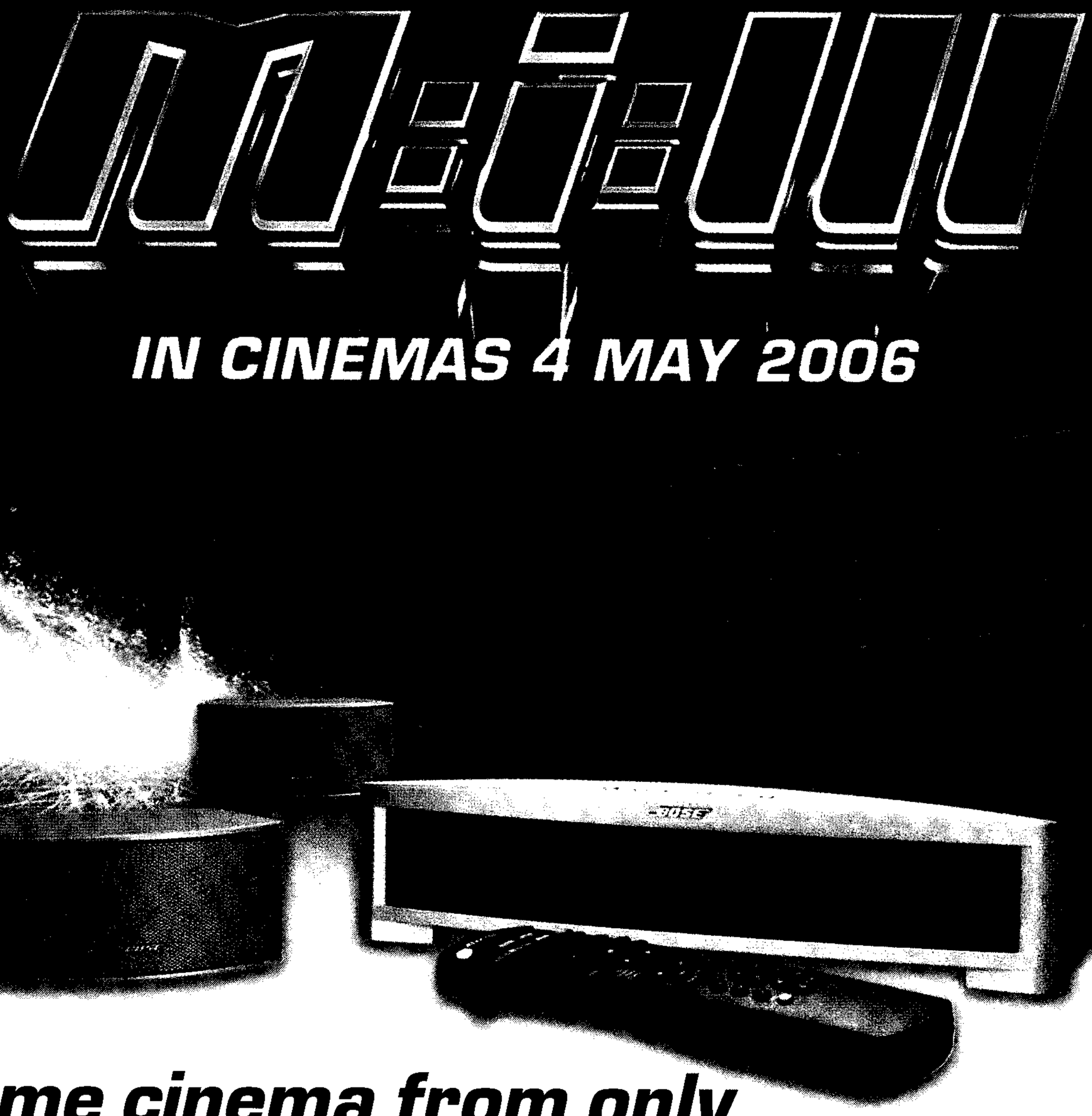

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